

“ All Communication should lead to change ”  
Aristotle



# LEARN BEFORE YOU SPEND

**Website conversion improvement  
techniques and measurement vendors  
explained in simple English**

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## **Introduction of sorts....**

This is the second edition of this e-book which is designed to help show you some easy ways to start treating your web site marketing more scientifically and some tried and tested tips and tricks to improve your conversion rates.

We are making an offer at the end of this book which we'd like you to look at and consider after you've digested the information.

We also give you the permission to do as you will with this literature. You can send it to colleagues, you can sell it at 100% profit, you can give it away as a gift to your subscribers. The only thing that you can't do is alter the contents of this e-book in any way.

We hope that you find this e-book useful and would welcome your feedback.

### **IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS**

**Conversion = a visitor that completes an action that you want them to take.**

**Conversion rate = Converts / Total Visitors as a percentage**

## Setting Goals

So now you know how to measure conversion just divide the amount of converts by the total number of visitors and you have your conversion rate. Great. So now what? Well there are a few basic things that you can do to improve your chances of converting more visitors and that is the point of this e-book. You want more conversion, more prospects, more sales, more happy customers, which brings us to the number one question you need to ask yourself. What is it you really want your visitor to do when they get to your website?

Before any measurement can take place website goals and measurable business objectives need to be set. It should become your roadmap for future success or failure, either you achieve your objectives and succeed, or you don't achieve your objectives and fail. Either way you will know why you got to where you ultimately ended up. Your goal is what you want your visitor to do in terms of an action, your objective is how you define success or failure.

### **Defining Your Website Goal.**

The web is a direct marketing tool that can be measured extraordinarily well. When talking about business to business (B2B) or business to consumer (B2C) web marketing you can break the web up into its own commercial functions. You can come up with 4 goal areas which align with these commercial functions thus allowing you to run your web marketing as part of your business strategy. Every commercial website will fall into one of these four areas.

**Prospect Acquisition (a.k.a. Lead Generation)** – your goal is gathering potential customers contact information, through your website. You simply want names, email addresses and other pertinent information of people who may be interested in your product.

**Sales (a.k.a. E-commerce, E-business)** – your goal is direct sales via your website i.e. e-commerce. So it's customers that pay with a credit card (or other method) for your products online that you're looking for.

**In House Cost Saving** – your goal being to reduce expenditure, usually in the form of resources such as print or in house activities which you automate online.

**Customer Service** – your goal being to reduce the expenditure to provide your customer service options.

You may define as many goals as you require but always bear in mind the message you wish to portray in your communication. Sales websites differ to a customer service website quite radically so it should be clear that you have 'one main goal' with your design and marketing focusing mainly on that one goal.

It is very common to have multiple website goals.

Let's take Amazon [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), as an example. They have a primary goal of sales and a secondary goal of prospect acquisition. If the goals were the other way around the site would be designed very differently in that you would have ways to get free reports and many incentives to entice subscribers. Instead it's very clear that the site is there to sell you something. You are hit with, 'deal of the day' where the most popular buys of the day are listed in the center of the page. The toolbar is a plethora of product based areas of the website. The secondary goal is to get you to subscribe with the right hand side of the screen (at the time of writing), having a personalize amazon.com button which is the only prospect acquisition part of the websites persuasion.

*So in short define the goal, the point, the reason for your websites existence before moving onto to part two your business objective.*

**Website Primary Goal (Tick)**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prospect Acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> Sales (E-commerce) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost saving          | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service   |

## Defining Your Business Objectives

Ok, so you have a checkbox ticked which says what the website primary goal is for your website. You have now taken the first step in the right direction and made a decision which means you are now treating your website marketing scientifically. You have defined what it is you want your website to do in very clear terms. Now comes the most essential part of your web business strategy. Defining a measurable objective.

### What Is A Measurable Objective?

A measurable objective is a number. It's that simple. It's a figure defining an achieved goal. So if your goal is prospect acquisition, 250 new prospects per year is a measurable objective. If it's sales 250 sales per year is a measurable objective. If it's cost savings 5000 dollars per year saved on printing is a measurable objective. If it's customer service 5000 dollars per year saved in support phone calls is a measurable objective.

### How Do I Set A Measurable Objective That's Realistic?

Your business objective should reflect the conversion rate improvement you want. This depends greatly on your cost per visitor and your cost per conversion. There is much more to setting a realistic objective which includes trend measurement over time, but if you consider the following formula a loose way to set a business objective then you're well on your way to treating the job more scientifically than most.

Conversion rate = total conversions / total visitors (as percentage)

Your cost per visitor = total website spend / total visitors (as dollar amount)

Your cost per conversion = total website spend / total conversions (as dollar amount)

Business objective = total conversions required to break even or turn a profit.

The economics behind working these metrics out are quite simple. You want to reduce cost per visitor and cost per conversion, by increasing the conversion rate thus achieving the business objective. The reason that you measure both cost per visitor and cost per conversion is because even if the cost per visitor is difficult to reduce then your cost per conversion is what you're aiming at getting to a low number (in other words increasing the conversion rate).

Now work out what your total spend per month is on your web marketing.

For instance lets take a conservative \$1000 per month including PPC (pay per click) adverts, web development costs, general advertising, PR and time.

If you then are driving 2000 visitors per month and are getting 10 sales per month the metrics pan out like this.

Conversion rate:  $10/2000 = 0.5\%$

Cost per visit:  $1000/2000 = \$0.5$

Cost per conversion:  $1000/10 = \$100$

Business objective: Break even number (in terms of the goal you have set)

Once you have the cost per conversion figure and cost per visit your objective becomes much easier to focus on. You should set the objective to be realistic in six months. So you might want to say as a business objective that your cost per visit is reduced to \$0.4 and your cost per conversion reduced to \$90.

Test your objectives, for at least one year, if you find you are meeting them too easily then the year after you can change them to reflect a more challenging objective. Obviously your year end objective should be to turn a profit so your business objective should reflect this.

**So define your business objective. A measurable number per year.**

**Business Objective.**\_\_\_\_\_

By setting a goal and an objective you begin to take the web seriously and can measure conversion rate always comparing it to your business objective. This objective will allow you to gauge your success.

## Direct conversion tips to apply to your website

So now you have your goal, you know what you want your website to do for you and a business objective has been set to define whether you're succeeding or failing. Now to some direct tips which you can apply to your website which can improve your conversion immediately.

### Headlines

Quite simply the most important part of the content each page can have and often the most overlooked. They should be specifically about the problem that the browser has. Consider these headlines:

- 1. Welcome to the Conversion Chronicles, solutions for improving website conversion.**
- 2. Are you driving qualified traffic to your website but not getting enough customers or prospects?**

Imagine you've arrived at the Conversion Chronicles website for the first time because you need to improve the take up, or conversion rate as we call it. Which of those two lines speaks directly to you? The first one is all bravado and assumes that you know what conversion is. What if you don't know what it means? And why should you care that we're welcoming you? It's not like you're getting a cup of coffee and introductions really is it? If you don't know the meaning of the word conversion then the chances are that you're gone. Your headline has to draw in the reader and immediately get the reader nodding in agreement. The headline has to get the reader to say, yes that's my problem, or yes that's me and start reading the rest of the text. The second headline which we're testing on the Conversion Chronicles landing page at the time of writing pinpoints two very important points to the reader. Firstly it asks if you're getting traffic. It even asks if it's qualified traffic, in other words the visitors you want at your pages, but even if you didn't know what qualified traffic was you would be able to understand roughly what we mean. Secondly it pinpoints the main problem in "not getting enough customers or prospects". So by reverting to very simple English and pinpointing the problem your reader has you target your audience much more effectively. For the best article I've ever read about writing headlines read this article by Sean D'Souza. (you may read it online here:

<http://www.conversionchronicles.com/page.php?PageID=48&tracking=articleheadlines>)

One thing that always should happen is that the headline is in bold or in <h> header tags within the HTML. Basically your headline should smack your reader between the eyes and not let go!



## Make text scan proof

Browsers don't or rarely sit and read text on screen word for word unless they're very interested. So make it easy for them to get interested. Keep the text a short width across your screen and highlight keywords in bold so that they can spell out at a quick glance the message you're trying to get across.

For instance which if these paragraphs works better when reading from a screen and what does scanning (quickly flicking your eyes over the text) reveal in both paragraphs?

### Paragraph 1

Does it annoy you to see **99% of your web traffic** arrive at your website only to **leave without doing anything**? Are you contemplating spending money on website design, search engine optimization, search directory listings, banner ad campaigns, or any other web marketing tools?

#### **Learn before you spend...**

Welcome to the Conversion Chronicles, a website dedicated to helping you to get a **consistent level of conversion** throughout the pages of your site **through education**, articles and resources.

### Paragraph 2

Does it annoy you to see 99% of your web traffic arrive at your website only to leave without doing anything? Are you contemplating spending money on website design, search engine optimization, search directory listings, banner ad campaigns, or any other web marketing tools?

Learn before you spend...

Welcome to the Conversion Chronicles, a website dedicated to helping you to get a consistent level of conversion throughout the pages of your site through education, articles and resources.

In paragraph 1 the bold text spells out "99% of your web traffic, leave without doing anything?" "Learn before you spend" "consistent level of conversion, through education". Put simply they are the words that the user will pick up first out of that paragraph and vastly improve conversion, much like a good headline we found in the variety of tests we have done. Paragraph 2 on the other hand while it says exactly the same thing is spread across the entire page has no bold text and forces the reader to do more work to understand what the content is about. The secret is to combine this 1<sup>st</sup> method of scan proofing with a killer headline.

## Maximize the potential of your graphics

This won't impress the flash and animated graphic guys one little bit, unless they're actually good designers who know what I'm about to say is true and adapt their graphics to work in this way. Basically a graphic is a complete waste of space unless it does something to help persuade the browser to convert or helps the browser understand what you're trying to say in some way. A graphic should never be used to fill in space unless it keenly portrays a useful message. For instance going back to the chronicles site again.

The landing page is split into three areas, the graphic on the right shown here is the seventh version of this graphic.

We wanted to have the graphic be striking, persuasive and fit with the rest of the site.

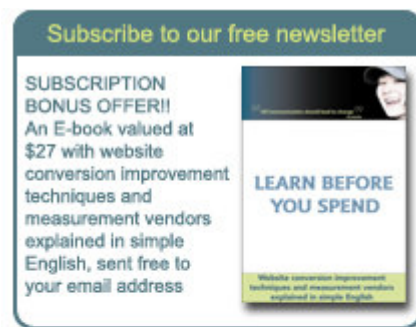
It's all about persuading the browser to subscribe. It's not a picture that has no point to it, similarly with every graphic we've tried to use. A bad example of the use of graphics can be found in just about every commercial website you go to where the landing page uses flash animations.

Now I'm not bashing the correct use of flash or animations which can help the browser to navigate or portray a powerful image which will help the site to convert but most Flash sites or animations that I've seen do nothing but compliment the talents of the designer.

It's all about using existing technology carefully and about doing things for a reason and testing your decisions by measuring results.

A bad example is a website I recently worked on which had a large picture in the center of the landing page showing off the corporate offices of the company. What is the point of that? Now this was the landing page, they were doing a commerce push in direct mail shots and trying to get people to use their e-store but had a picture of the office block on their landing page and a tiny little link to the e-store.

Graphics used wisely are great. Otherwise they merely waste space. In the above example lets take a look at what's good about it.



Your name

Your email

HTML  Text

**Subscribe**

[we respect your privacy](#)

Firstly it fits with the rest of the color scheme.

Secondly it is a very clear persuasion point, it's on every page and it's an obvious offer.

Thirdly it offers a value to the reader (\$27). In our case we actually had an independent e-book library called Eweline value and offer our book for sale on their website, so we knew the value of this document before we put it online.

Fourthly it implies 4 simple benefits which are easy to understand in the text next to the picture:

1. It includes conversion improvement techniques.
2. It includes information about web measurement vendors.
3. It is explained in simple English.
4. It is sent free to your email address (which also means that the reader will give you a valid email address to send the book to).

Underneath all of this is the very simple form (name and email address plus selecting the type of email you want to receive) and a subscribe button which is obviously something you have to press. The final part which is very important is the link to the privacy page, so that the reader can find out how the email address is to be used. Of course not everything about the persuasive point above is a graphic but it's all copy. It's important to know the difference between copy (persuasion) and content (information)

**All communication should lead to change – Aristotle**

## **Develop Distinct Web Copy And Web Content**

What is the difference?

Many web sites do not make a distinction between web copy and web content. If your website does not make this distinction and follow simple guidelines then you're heading for trouble. A little time and effort spent in making the distinction and getting your copy and content correct will improve your websites usability, navigation and conversion rates.

### **Web Copy**

Web copy is that part of the sites text which is designed to persuade you to do something or take some action. It may be the link saying 'subscribe now' or 'add to cart'. It may be the opening paragraph on the first page of your website which persuades your users to do what you want them to do. Your title headings are copy, your links to reassurances about privacy, shipping and warranties are copy. It is copy that guides your browser through your pages so you should make it as powerful psychologically if it's a headline as you possibly can.

### **Web Content**

Web content is the part of your website which you want or need your browsers to read. Articles are content, your after sales service description, your specifications page, a page with contact details in fact anything which describes something in detail. However content does not simply impassively provide information. To improve conversion your content should solve your browsers problem, answer their questions and then your copy should kick in again to get them to continue to the next level of your persuasive process.

Copy and content go hand in hand, it would be wasteful if when copywriting the persuasion is superb but then is let down by woeful content but on the flip side if you have tremendously engaging and exciting content which the user isn't persuaded to see by poor copy then the content writing has been a waste of time.

## Make use of Urgency

Urgency is a great persuasive element in a website. If you can convince your visitor that he is going to miss out somehow if he doesn't act quickly then you will improve conversion.

Here are two examples on how to use urgency throughout websites.

### 1) Time Expiry Offer.

"For the next fifteen minutes, in the frozen food section, free passion fruit sorbet for everyone" was a quote from the excellent book by Paco Underhill - Why We Buy. Just as in this example, you could let your readers know they will miss out if they haven't subscribed or bought your product by a certain time. It's a good way to tie in campaigns to clear products from your existing stock by offering discounts until a certain deadline for instance.

### 2) The Nth Number Factor.

The website states that all buyers before the first 1000 products sold get a free bonus product perhaps combined with a visible counter of the current number of purchases. The Nth number factor can also be combined with the time factor. The offer at the end of this book has an nth number factor applied in that we only do 30 assessments monthly meaning you have to get in quickly in order to be accepted for a critique. That is simply to control the amount of work we have to do every month but it works in the same way.

## **Differentiate yourself from your competition.**

By being different, by making yourself stand out from the crowd you improve your chances of repeat visitors and recognition in a world full of choices. Our website went from a 4% subscription rate to 15% on a monthly basis once we differentiated ourselves from our competition. Here's some practical advice on how to differentiate yourself and your website.

### 1) Examine your marketplace.

List your top competitors, the people who you're currently going to have to fight for market share. List their attributes, the one thing that each company tries to communicate, and see if they own anything. By owning something, I mean a word, a concept, an idea about the products they are selling. You're looking to find their strengths and weaknesses as they exist in the mind of the customer. Your objective, at this stage of your research, should be to find something in your product that no one owns. This is also useful in order to see if your idea is actually viable and it's never a bad idea to research what your competition is doing. This is actually the vital stage in differentiating yourself from your competitors; you have to find out how they are currently perceived.

### 2) Find your difference.

You're looking to be unique, to find that one thing which separates you from your competition. There are many ways to find your difference. Being the first or the market leader is a differentiator. Harvard is the number one university in the United States and it plays on that perception. Owning a characteristic or a word is a differentiating idea. In our own example, The Conversion Chronicles, our goal is to own the word 'Conversion'. Owning an attribute is a differentiator. Volvo owns 'safe', Ferrari owns 'speed' and McDonalds owns 'kids' in the sense that it's a fast food restaurant for children. Heritage is a differentiating idea. If you have been in business for 70 years and have served 50,000 customers, then no one can take that away from you. It makes you different. Locality can make you different if you're the only company in your region selling what you sell. Being a specialist can make you different. Sean D'Souza is an internationally known marketing consultant specializing in what happens in a customer's brain and his company name is different, Psychotactics. How a product is made can make it different. Dove Soap according to David Ogilvy, is the number one in the USA with its main difference advertised by Ogilvy & Mather as 'Moisturizing Lotion', the difference is the lotion in the soap. Being the latest or the newest can make you different. So with these thoughts in mind, examine your products or services and find your difference.

3) Make sure you can do what you say.

Finding your difference and knowing the market is one thing, but you actually have to be able to back your uniqueness up. If you market yourself in a differentiating way, you should be able to demonstrate that difference. Dove Soap, for instance, has got moisturizer in it!

4) Tell people about your difference.

In effect, this is the part where you start developing your website with the difference in mind, all your communication and messages to your potential customer should be about passing on that difference. Get down to the nitty gritty, the website title, your domain name, your tag line or slogan, your articles, your company perception, your email signatures, everything that you communicate should tell people why you're different. Indeed if it's required, don't stop at your website, your advertising, your brochures, your business cards, even your yearly Christmas gifts should all communicate why you are different from your competition.

## Relevancy Towards Your Visitors

You begin with keywords which relate to and qualify your readers. This helps with search engine visibility and means your visitors feel like they are in the right place when they arrive at your website. PPC campaigns should qualify your audience initially and when clicked should land at a highly relevant and specific landing page. This means your advertisements are working for you and not simply driving traffic which isn't targeted well enough. Your web site message should not try to cater for everyone, it should be specific and relevant to a particular target market. This means that you can focus your message in relation to what your visitor wants. Finally you should find strategic partners who work in related industries with similar target audiences to your own. This means you improve your own visibility to your target audience. In simple terms being relevant means putting the right offer in front of the right people and by getting more of the right people to your website, you improve your conversion rates considerably.

To explain what I mean by relevance I'll break it down further.

### **Keywords**

Keywords are important for two reasons.

Firstly by using the keywords which relate to your reader you get listed by search engines accordingly meaning that people can find you. Notice that I phrased the last sentence carefully. I said 'keywords which relate to your reader'. It's important to understand that what you consider 'key words' might not be the keywords your visitors are using to reach you.

Secondly and from my point of view more importantly keywords help to qualify your audience after they have arrived at your web site. If you click through from a search engine to a web site and the headline or first paragraph don't strike you as relevant to what you're looking for you're likely to 'bounce' (in other words leave the site). The key words you use help to assure your visitor they are in the right place.

Good use of keywords embedded in your copy and content will firstly help you to attract the right kind of people and secondly help to effectively qualify them as being in the right place. If you manage to attract and qualify them, the reader is then more likely to click through to find out more about what your website is about. If they do that, there is a much higher chance that they will convert to your desired goal.



A good SEO or SEM company in my opinion is one that understands that it's about answering the visitors' needs, not simply packing the website with related key words and phrases.

## **Paid Traffic**

Pay per click (or PPC) is when you set-up an account with a search engine (Google or Overture for instance) and write ads which appear when a certain keyword is requested by a visitor to the search engine. If a visitor clicks your ad you pay a predefined fee to the search engine. PPC done correctly is a good way to drive people interested in your product or services to your website and clever PPC marketing should positively effect conversion.

One of our clients recently asked me about a PPC campaign (run by another company) that was converting poorly. The reason it was converting poorly is because the ad was optimized to be clicked through and not optimized to qualify the reader. To explain in more detail, the product in the ad was a mobility scooter costing \$1850. The ad explained you could get great discounts on mobility scooters and therefore the click through on the ad was quite high. Therefore it was an expensive campaign for our client which didn't convert into sales.

In my opinion this particular ad should try to qualify the reader more by having the price and location in the ad. My reasoning is that a fair percentage of visitors who are interesting in purchasing an expensive item like a mobility scooter will want to see it first. Therefore a good way to actually sell this particular product is to tell the reader the price and location so they know without going to the website whether the product is for them. If they click through and look it doesn't matter if they don't purchase but then come to the physical store and buy because they know the product is in their home town. Price in the ad pre-qualifies that they have the money. So if they have the money, are in the market and are in the same city there is a much higher chance of a purchase.

Another thing you should remember in PPC campaigns is the relevance of the ad to your landing page. It's an often overlooked problem that the PPC ad doesn't relate directly to the landing page. In the case of our client they did this correctly by linking the Google ads directly to the page about mobility scooters. A common mistake however is to link the ads to a home page which expects the visitor to work to find what it is you're selling.

Too many PPC companies work on click through as their gauge of success. They see it as their job to drive the traffic rather than convert it. The idea of successful PPC marketing is simple

economics. You spend less than you earn from the visitors that arrive and make a profit. However ads that use the shotgun approach aren't doing you any favors. Ads that you're paying for should bring in very interested and pre-qualified visitors that convert at a higher level than free traffic.

### **Target Your Market**

You can't please everyone and it's fatal to try to do so. You have to figure out your best chance of business from your audience and cater to that area of business. If you have a large varied audience or are running some kind of portal then you should have a clear strategy to attract people to dedicated sections of your website.

For instance in the field of small business there are 1000's of different wants, needs and requirements to cater for. Your landing page (home or index page) is going to have a very hard time catering for all of those people effectively. So quite simply don't try. Figure out by measuring how people find you, what the biggest segment of traffic look for and cater for that group. Then take the second biggest segment of traffic and develop a different landing page for them, using content (and embedded keywords) more relevant to their wants and needs. It's possible to develop big websites which cater for a variety of different audiences but not all in the same page.

For instance, a small business owner in need of a sample contract of employment isn't immediately going to be interested in accountancy services. He might be interested in a resources section which has sample documents for download and lawyers who cater for small businesses. If therefore this visitor arrived to find a website with a plethora of choices when all he wants is a sample contract then he is likely to leave.

If however a section of your website was dedicated solely to business documents and sample downloads for small businesses and the visitor clicks through to this page from a search engine, there is a much higher chance he will browse to find what he is looking for. If then he sees that you have more resources (like an accountancy portal link) then he may even bookmark your site before leaving and that's what you want, repeat visitors.

## **Find relevant strategic partners**

Being at the top of the search engines is not entirely necessary but it certainly helps. You should try to get a listing on the first page of results for your chosen keywords. Put simply if people have to look through to link number 8074 on Google to read about your products and services then you're not likely to be found.

For example if you do a Google search for 'improving website conversion' our site appears in the top position as we've optimized for that key phrase. We hoped that this is what our potential visitor will key in when doing a search. However while this was part of our strategy it was only a very small part as you cannot rely on search engine algorithms to pay your bills.

The alternative and safety net to relying on the all powerful search engine algorithm is to find strategic partners who like what you do and want to re-print your information. That is what people go online to do, find information and surprisingly not enough businesses realize this.

Strategic linking while harder work than submitting your site to search engines works very well. The subscription conversion rate average from our top strategic partners is 31%. By that I mean nearly a 3rd of the visits coming from the partners who re-print our articles subscribe. Because the partners we're working with are well known and highly respected they are a great qualification vehicle. Upon visiting our partner website, the visitor reads what we've said (in articles, forum posts, blog entries, advertisements etc.), like what they see, click through to our site and subscribe. In this way the reader arrives warmed up to what you have to say so the conversion rate is much improved.

The added benefit of this is that the more outbound links you have pointing to you, the higher your ranking gets on many of the search engines. Another benefit is that even if you can't get listed on search engines directly for all your keywords, some of the partner sites will do so due to their own visibility, so more paths flow to you. This is a far more effective strategy than SEO/SEM alone.

## **Which brings me onto measurement**

In order to improve conversion after you have applied all the above tactics you then need to measure your website visitor levels and you should really be thinking and measuring a lot more than just the amount of visitors, though that is a different book! In the last chapter of this e-book I'll go onto to explain a few things about web traffic measurement and review what I consider 6 of the best tools available.

## Is Your Web Site Geared For Good Measurement?

You need to start at the beginning, actually with your website design. There are two things you must not do when designing a website which you want to measure accurately. The bad news is that if you're using either of these design methods then in order to accurately measure conversion the easiest way is to change the way you present your website to the world.

### The Use Of Frames

Frames solve design problems and many designers love them. This is because they are easy to implement and it's easy to control the layout and look of a website when using frames. However a frameset is not a particularly viable solution when talking about accurately measuring the page impressions. Take a typical frameset with three pages connected together. Every time that frameset is accessed 3 impressions are registered with the server logs completely skewing your statistics. Effectively in this example trebling your page impression count. It's possible still to measure and track using frames but it's an awful lot harder and is effected by many more variables. Anything you can do with frames you can do with HTML tables and it is merely down to either the page load speed being faster with frames or simply a short cut being taken by the designer. Arguably load times with framesets can be faster but again, good clean HTML coding with tables is just as effective. Designers may use frames to cut down on the development time as it is less difficult programmatically to produce a frameset, than it is to produce tables. It may be cheaper and take less time, but do you want something cheap and difficult to measure? In addition frames throw up other search engine problems and in some very old browsers aren't even supported. It's up to you but we do not regard framesets an option. The question you need to ask is how difficult do you want to make it for yourself?

## The Use Of Flash & Shockwave

While frames are a quick and easy way to design websites, Flash is usually a more expensive resource to buy so you would think that there wouldn't be any problems with Flash and measurement. Not so. The reason that Flash and Shockwave websites are expensive is mainly due to the design and quality of the graphic work that goes into the site. Some Shockwave and Flash sites are quite simply breathtaking to look at, superb with usability and user interaction and even portray a great message. However most Shockwave and Flash sites that I have examined do one thing badly. They do not measure user interaction. One exception I think is Macromedia, <http://www.macromedia.com>. Now this isn't a design flaw of Flash or Shockwave it's the way that most designers don't plan for measurement when they develop in Flash. What usually happens is that a shockwave file is embedded into one HTML page which then controls the whole website. So the user never leaves the page but rather moves around within an embedded shockwave file. Flash and Shockwave can be embedded into as many HTML pages as required so it's a design problem not a technology one. All you need to do if you're going to use flash and shockwave is have multiple shockwave files embedded into numerous pages so that the user experience is the same but the file container is split up into smaller parts. This will allow you to measure more than knowing that a certain quantity of visitors visited one page on your website. Only two measurement tools I know of can track Flash and Shockwave Red Sheriff and IRIS Metrics. However it's probably only a matter of time before the rest catch up.

## Server Based Measurement Or Browser Based Application Service Provider?

When considering what kind of analysis you want to undertake you should come to a decision on what kind of tool to use based on firstly the accuracy you require and secondly the price you are prepared to pay. There are two kinds currently available, server based measurement or application service provider.

### Server Based Measurement

This is a program that measures activity based on the text files held on the web server. What typically happens is that the tool will either automatically refer to the text file and generate reports based on what is recorded in the files or you will manually install your own log files into the tool which then produces the reports you desire.

Advantages:

- Usually the tools are cheap to install and configure if not free with the web host or server you use.
- Fast set-up time. Usually a web host will have software pre-installed and configured allowing you to instantly start measuring.

Disadvantages:

- Misleading reporting methods. Unless you filter out a large number of visits from your reporting and develop your own method to decipher proxy users then you will have problems getting accurate figures from your server logs. The reasons for this are explained below.

#### 1) **Crawlers.**

Search engine spiders often visit your pages for the very legitimate reason of indexing your pages for search engines. If your site has 200 pages you might have thousands of page impressions logged which are meaningless. You also are often scanned by SPAM software for email addresses which add up the page impressions. Server logs record this data along with your valid visitor data making it inaccurate.

## 2) **Proxies.**

If you get visits from people within a company which uses a proxy server, which might have thousands of users behind it the proxy server will only be counted as 1 IP address. So it doesn't give any indication of how many people visited. It could be one person visiting thousands of times or thousands of individual users but you have no way of knowing through server logs.

Metrical analysis can still be done quite effectively using web log server measurement as long as you know what to filter out. Our testing on <http://www.webpage.co.uk/> resulted in an 85% accurate figure from logs as oppose 99.95% figure from an ASP.



## Browser Based Application Service Provider

The way that these programs work is that information from each browser that visits your website is recorded usually in a database and then the data is manipulated into reports which you can read. Typically these services ask you to paste some HTML code into your web pages. A cookie is used to determine which user is accessing the site. These are then tracked on a remote server somewhere and you login to view the reports.

### Advantages:

- Very accurate. The only variable is when a user has cookies turned off and this is very rare. No problems with crawlers or proxies either. The reasons are explained below.
  - 1) Cookies are very rarely turned off. After 6 months testing on stats gathered 99.95% of visitors had cookies enabled on their web browser and this is pretty useful in most cases. Even if they are turned off in most cases the browser can be tracked as a visit, just that no data about that particular user can be recorded. So if the browser comes back it just registers as another visit rather than register as the same visitor coming back twice.
  - 2) Proxy and Crawler problems negated. This is because crawlers are software programs designed to move from link to link on the Internet and gather information. In other words they are not a web browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. This means that the tracking software automatically ignores them. When people come from behind a proxy server they are still using a web browser to access the Internet page. This means that the browser software is assigned a unique cookie which means you can record how many different browsers come from behind the proxy.

### Disadvantages:

- Price. Usually because of associated bandwidth requirements, the cost of running the service as well as maintenance, mean the prices are often quite restrictive.

If you need accuracy then a Browser Based Application Service Provider is the way to start your measurement strategy.

## The Vendors

What follows is a short analysis of 6 web tools I have either used, researched or been involved with over the last few years. As discussed earlier when you learn how to measure conversion you begin to see that the web is a pretty powerful medium to gather useful data about your visitors. Measurement strategies are becoming increasingly important as businesses begin to see that the web is a direct marketing medium which can be predicted, monitored and used in a professional manner, rather than in many cases merely being another contact channel.

To clarify these are **my opinions** formed about each respective tool. The companies in question may or may not agree with the opinions I have formed and you may draw different conclusions because of your use of these tools in different circumstances or situations but these are my opinions based on my knowledge and research findings about each product.

If you are going to use this document to help you choose a web measurement tool I would advise that you delve a little more deeply into each tools specific reporting strengths in respect to your business. If you need a particular measurement or statistic, ask the vendor in question if the software reports it, be very clear what you want and try more than one vendor.



### **Clickstream Technologies PLC**

The Old Granary, Westwick, Cambridge, CB4 5AR, UK.

URL: <http://www.clickstream.com>

Email: [info@clickstream.com](mailto:info@clickstream.com)

### **Clickstream the company:**

The core measurement technology behind Clickstream was invented in 1997 by the R&D division of Green Cathedral plc, a digital communications software, solutions and innovation company based in Cambridge, UK. Clickstream Technologies plc was founded in 1999 to refine, package and bring to market a range of solutions based on the core Clickstream technology. Clickstream Technologies remains privately held and is a fully independent company with independent shareholders and management.

### **Technical commentary:**

Clickstream uses browser based cookies to record page displays (impressions) as well as page and frame timings. Why Clickstream gets into my top six is because of the way it handles data. Where other applications mean that Javascript often has to be embedded into every page that requires tracking in order to be reported back to a remote server Clickstream handles it all itself. It handles dynamic (PHP, ASP for instance) and static pages (I.E. HTML) and uses a server plugin with a data collector to pass the measurements back to a reporting system. That in itself is pretty clever because it means that the set-up is very fast. No messing around with putting tags or JavaScript into pages just put the plugin on the server whose sites are to be measured and you're on your way. Clickstream will track sites hosted by IIS, Apache v1.3, Apache v2 and Zeus web servers, on Windows, Linux or Solaris.

**Tracking Ability:**

Banner impressions (serving)  
Email (using preset landing URL's)  
Links and landing pages  
Page views (all)  
Products bought  
Form variable information  
Banner click-throughs  
Path analysis

**Advantages:**

- 100% data accuracy
- Fast simple set-up

**Disadvantages:**

Clickstream is a server configuration meaning that if you're not running your own web server and you want to use Clickstream then the server must have the plugin installed. So if you want to use Clickstream, you either need to find a company using it and host your site with them or get your own server and get your own license.

**Pricing:**

Medium to high range. Training and consultancy is £850 per day, set-up usually takes five days and there are other associated licensing and support costs done on a per deal basis.

**Comments:**

Clickstream has played on the data accuracy strengths it has and understandably so, as it is a highly accurate solution. While no company can be 100% accurate when it comes to tracking people (what if the same person visits a website being tracked by Clickstream from different ends of the globe?) they do track the data as accurately as is possible. Pricing for the solution is fair for server solutions though a single small company website would probably balk at the prices. To be fair to Clickstream they aren't aiming at this market they are aiming at the web server market like most of the other vendors mentioned here. Clickstream in my opinion could be a good partner solution for large business intelligence vendors, digital channels and enterprise solutions with a need for multiple reporting. The system is designed to allow web server administrators to define a different type of report for different departments and that fits well with many of the larger business reporting requirements.



**ClickTracks Inc.**

555 N. Mathilda Ave Suite 98, Sunnyvale, CA 94086, USA

URL: <http://www.clicktracks.com>

Email: [info@clicktracks.com](mailto:info@clicktracks.com)

**Clicktracks the company:**

Clicktracks was founded in 2001 and the first product shipped the following year. Founded by John Marshall (CEO) who has 20 years experience in the software industry and Dr Steven Turner (author of the free Analog statistic analysis program, the most popular trend analysis software in the world).

**Technical commentary:**

Clicktracks is traditional web log server reporting software which can be used on any PC after downloading the raw log files from the web server. It is this feature and the fact that it is unique in its ability to display graphical data that wins it a place in my top six. The graphical interface in particular is very clever showing visitor navigation graphs actually on the pages of the particular site being tracked. For those that want to analyze paths not from the start to finish way that most vendors do but graphically on each page this is the only solution I know of that does it in this particular way. It works on Windows 98, NT 4 (service pack 6), ME, 2000 or XP.

**Tracking ability:**

Banner impressions (Inbound clicks on banners)

Banner click-throughs (Visitors coming through an individual banner or broader campaign can be tracked all the way through the site from entry to transaction.)

Email (As banner click through)

Links and landing pages

Products bought (Can be analysed with ClickTracks, though without collating pricing information.)

**Advantages:**

- Friendly user interface
- Ability to measure with raw data logs offline
- Good value for money

**Disadvantages:**

Server logs have many inaccuracies within them that need to be filtered first and the system doesn't really do a good job of catering for that so data is not 100% accurate. Also there is a fair amount of work to do after the statistics are gathered, if you want to use the solution for marketing purposes, cost per click, cost per visitor, cost per visit, is readily available if you drill down far enough but Clicktracks doesn't actually report these values.

**Pricing:**

Low to medium. The price for a single user license is £1500

**Comments:**

Clicktracks is clearly aimed at the SME market and is very affordable. It can be used on the web server (directly reporting on the server log files) or can be used on a local PC using the raw web server logs. The usability and graphical interface is it's strength, the work to get accuracy is its weakness. I see this product being very popular with actual design people rather than marketing people, so web designers and graphic designers will prefer Clicktracks over more traditional traffic reporting tools. Interestingly many companies have used Clicktracks as a starter product, to test measurement strategies, possibly because the cost is relatively low. Clicktracks compare themselves and see WebTrends as their main competitor, the other big server log reporting tool. Indeed much of their sales and marketing is proving that they are better than WebTrends, and in some respects at least I agree with them.



**WebTrends / NetIQ  
Worldwide Headquarters**

NetIQ Corporation  
3553 North First Street • San Jose, CA 95134

Email: [info@netiq.com](mailto:info@netiq.com)

URL: [www.netiq.com](http://www.netiq.com)

**WebTrends The Company:**

Webtrends have been around since 1993 and recently merged with NetIQ in 2001. They are one of the big players of web measurement companies having the largest market share in the USA and one of the biggest client lists from all of the products analyzed. In 2002 they brought in \$278 Million in revenue an increase of 67% on the previous year. I have decided to look at the enterprise entry WebTrends Reporting Center to give a fairer comparison to the other tools.

**Technical Commentary (Web Trends Reporting Center):**

The software can be installed on Win32, Solaris or Red Hat Linux operating systems and is administered from the browser. Traditionally WebTrends relied upon web server logs only however in addition they now use client side data tagging which is much more accurate, as an alternative to the existing system of log files. The data tagging collects data direct from the client browser as with most ASP systems and also can record users through authentication and browser/IP. Server logs are also still used if preferred. One last thing to add the SmartSource data tagging as it's called can also be turned into a log file and reported by the traditional WebTrends software.



**Tracking Ability:**

Banner clickthrough

Path analysis

Email campaigns (landing pages)

Products bought

Form variable information

**Advantages:**

- Path analysis highly sophisticated
- Conversion can be easily measured or calculated
- SmartSource data is accurate
- Comprehensive reporting

**Disadvantages:**

Only a single server version is available, you can't install it on a web hosting solution unless the web space provider already has WebTrends on the server. So much data is offered that it may actually be a disadvantage to less experienced analysts.

**Pricing:**

Medium. WebTrends Reporting Center Enterprise Edition £7,000.00. WebTrends Reporting Center eBusiness Edition £2,400.00

**Comments:**

Webtrends has been in the business so long that it is a victim of its own success. Many have said that the bad press that WebTrends has received has been due to the poor perception of log based reporting systems that they exclusively used and was completely deserved. Others have commented that it was down to bad use of the tools by the end users. Personally I think WebTrends is a pretty good tool, in comparison with the others on the market in terms of the competitive pricing and the level of accuracy the SmartSource system gives you. Indeed the comprehensiveness of the reporting system is one of its strengths but in my opinion might also be overwhelming to the inexperienced web analyst. WebTrends have an advantage over the rest of the measurement systems on the market in that they have the resources available to them and a huge customer base. It remains to be seen how they will cope with the competition and re-educate their customer base so as not to lose them to a perceived more accurate competitor. The reason I put them in my top six is because as an experienced analyst of statistics their system is very comprehensive and the tool can be used for any kind of measurement you require (though you have to do some work yourself to work out conversion rates, cost per visitor, or keyword value).



### **Red Eye International Ltd**

24-28 Nelsons Row

London

SW4 7JT

UK

Email: [info@redeye.com](mailto:info@redeye.com)

URL: [www.redeye.com](http://www.redeye.com)

### **Red Eye The Company:**

Red Eye International Limited based in London in the UK, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Red Eye International Holdings PLC. Red Eye was founded in 1997 by Paul Cook an experienced marketer with a background in computer science. The company is well placed with a revenue of £1.3 million in 2002.

### **Technical commentary:**

This platform is an ASP managed solution with tags being embedded into pages across the website to be tracked either with Javascript or plain HTML. It works by tracking the browsers of the system and filtering out spiders and other information which is not required for reporting on people, though that information can be stored. Unique users are tracked by IP or by sessions. Duplicated data can be removed and internal activity can be filtered out.

### **Tracking ability:**

Banner impressions

Banner click-throughs

Lifetime ROI of campaigns

Emails opened

Email click-throughs

Links and landing pages

Page views

Path analysis

Products bought (by category, product ID, value, price, basket)

Personal information/form data (all data can be collected warehoused including personal, financial, behavioural and business specific)

Data from enterprise wide CRM databases can be imported as can data from 3<sup>rd</sup> party sources

### **Advantages:**

- RedEye look at the product as a tool to complete their service which is to help customers improve their prospect/sales conversion
- Enterprise solutions and eCrm Fullfillment systems are very well catered for due to good visitor segmentation tracking. (By grouping together certain sets of visitors based on site behavior, purchases or personal data accrued)
- No web server required. 3<sup>rd</sup> party hosted websites can be monitored by RedEye

### **Disadvantages:**

As with WebTrends the amount of data may be a little overwhelming for inexperienced analysts. Even experienced web developers and marketing people without eCRM or CRM knowledge may find reporting difficult. Also because of the nature of the reporting the websites being tracked need to have coding and adjustments made to them.

### **Pricing:**

Medium to high £4000+ per customer.

**Comments:**

Red Eye the company positions itself as an eCRM expert. Indeed at the time of writing the title bar of the landing page of their website says, "UK Based eCRM experts, providing tailored customer relationship management solutions to ebusinesses. One to one marketing, online direct marketing." There is nothing there about the web measurement tools that they offer, and that's because they view their tools as just that. A tool that helps with their consultancy, which is based around tailored CRM solutions. In that respect I don't think there is any better measurement tool out there, the CRM aspect is certainly very well defined and adapted. From a website measurement perspective they are also pretty good, especially if you want to define user segments and target visitors based on how they use your website. The fact that Red Eye can also be added to any website makes it a good choice for smaller SME companies who are hosted, though many smaller enterprises may balk at the cost. It will be interesting to see how Red Eye continue to position themselves and compete with the rest of the vendors in the market place. Will they stick to their current focus eCRM and challenge the players in that industry or become more focused on the data analytics side of their business. At the moment their pitch seems to be kind of a mixed message in that they can do both. However my opinion is that they excel at the eCRM consulting and have a very powerful tracking tool to back it up.



**Redsheriff  
European HQ**

77 St John Street  
London  
EC1M 4AN

Email: [info@redsheriff.com](mailto:info@redsheriff.com)

Web: <http://www.redsheriff.com>

**RedSheriff the company:**

An Australian company headquartered in New York with global office locations, RedSheriff is recognized as the largest provider of Web Analytics. Established in 1996, the company boasts strategic partnerships with global industry leaders such as WPP, AGB Group, Taylor Nelson Sofres, Video Research, Ericsson, Oracle, Sun Microsystems, Intel and Microsoft.

**Technical commentary:**

This platform is an ASP solution with code being embedded into pages across the website to be tracked with code supplied by RedSheriff. The data from the browser is then sent to RedSheriff's data centers where it is logged to be analyzed later in reporting systems. What is particularly impressive about RedSheriff is its ability to track Flash websites. Flash can be developed without the hassle of having to put different Flash containers on different pages to track between the HTML like most other tools. RedSheriff can also track how people move through the interactive flash media just like a normal website. There are no server/software requirements with RedSheriff so it means any website can be tracked.

**Tracking ability:**

Banner click-throughs

Email (open rates, response rates, conversions etc.)

Custom Links / landing pages etc.

Page views (all or limited/aggregated)

Products bought (undistinguished and/or by category and product ID, value, price)

Personal information/form data

3<sup>rd</sup> party imported data

Path Analysis

**Advantages:**

- No web server required. 3<sup>rd</sup> party hosted websites can be monitored by RedSheriff
- Flash, WAP and Wireless can be tracked
- Path analysis highly sophisticated
- Conversion can be easily measured or calculated
- Highly accurate

**Disadvantages:**

Data needs to be inserted on the pages of the websites to be tracked.

**Price:**

Medium to high /depending on the type and quantity of page impressions served:

Standard starts at £50 per month

Professional starts at £200 per month

Media starts at £500 per month

Usually the figures are higher than that, "starts" at those prices being the operative word.

**Comments:**

RedSheriff is big and global. Unlike the rest of the tools mentioned here customers of RedSheriff come from Australia, Asia, the USA and Europe. Not only are the tools impressive but they also consult on market intelligence and research the data gathered. Like WebTrends, RedSheriff have the advantage of a huge customer base and a large number of resources available to them but have never had to overcome the stigma of being inaccurate like WebTrends have. RedSheriff have had an almost unprecedented rise to the top of the pile of web traffic tools and if the customer continues to bear the expense that their systems cost then RedSheriff will continue to dominate the market.





**IRIS Metrics  
Aboavista Oy**

ElectroCity D 4  
Tykistökatu 4 D  
Turku  
FIN-20520  
Finland

Email : [info@irismetrics.com](mailto:info@irismetrics.com)

Web : <http://www.irismetrics.com>

**IRIS Company:**

IRIS is a service run by Aboavista established in Finland in 2002. The company is privately held partnership which consults on improving website visitor conversion to a prospect or customer. The owners decided to develop the service as web analytics are critically important to the service offerings of the company.

**Technical Commentary:**

IRIS uses tagging in a similar way to other ASP companies. Two lines of JavaScript code are added to the web pages that are tracked and then the information from the browser is passed back to a data center for analysis in real time. Conversion is the focus of the system and better than average conversion reporting is well measured. Financial information is also displayed because the system can optionally be set-up to report on PPC costs and give aggregated return on advertising spend. There are no server/software requirements with IRIS so it means any website can be tracked. In addition it is also possible to track flash websites with IRIS.

**Tracking ability:**

Email (landing pages, conversions etc.)

Custom Links / landing pages etc.

Custom Graphics

Page views (all or limited/aggregated)

Products bought (undistinguished and/or by category and product ID, value, price)

Path Analysis (by visitor and aggregated most popular)

Conversion (Direct from customer inputted paths/keyword to sale)

**Advantages:**

- No web server required. 3<sup>rd</sup> party hosted websites can be monitored by IRIS
- Path analysis highly sophisticated
- Conversion is reported
- Financial data is reported
- Highly accurate

**Disadvantages:**

IRIS needs to have code embedded on the pages to be tracked.

IRIS is relatively new and unknown in the marketplace.

**Pricing:**

Low to high (high usage enterprise level page counts).

Premium - \$19.95 per month for 50,000 page views.

E-commerce - \$49.95 per month for 50,000 page views.

Ad-Media - \$79.95 per month for 50,000 page views.

**Comments:**

Where RedSheriff is Global, IRIS is relatively new and untested on the market. IRIS has a different perspective to the other tools analysed in that it's actually developed specifically for the purpose of improving conversion rates. Aboavista are a company focused on simply improving the conversion rates of websites and have specifically developed the service for this purpose while also attempting not to overwhelm customers with data. It's very easy for the customer of the Ad Media version to see what ROI he is getting for his website expenditure. Because Aboavista offer the conversion improvement consultancy alongside the tool there is a great scope for IRIS and should be one to keep an eye out for in the future. It will be interesting to see if IRIS remains as a tool to improve conversion as part of the Aboavista services or if it moves aggressively into the web measurement market place and directly competes with RedSheriff/WebTrends.

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Here is what some of our readers have to say.

"Excellent edition, it's always good to get a reminder about ways to improve especially one of such high quality. I feel excited when you talk about conversion and give practical examples"

**Haidon Carter**  
**Forest Gate**  
**London, UK**

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**Peter Brown, CEO**  
**AHI Technology Solutions**  
**California**  
**USA**

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**Jeremy Boone**  
**Carolina ADI**  
**Charlotte, NC USA**

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**Michael Shrivathsan**  
**Veraci Inc.,**  
**Texas**  
**USA**

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**Tapani Jalonen**  
**Web Developer**  
**GREY PRO Oy**  
**Helsinki**  
**Finland**

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## About the author

**Steve Jackson**

**Editor – Conversion Chronicles**

**Web – <http://www.conversionchronicles.com>**

**Email – [steve@conversionchronicles.com](mailto:steve@conversionchronicles.com)**

Steve's career started in heavy industry in 1990 in the UK where he learnt technical writing and programming skills, as well as getting his teeth wet early with measurement skills as an inspection technician for a large automotive company. In 1997 he began working full time in web development working with 3 start-up companies and a number of other businesses as an independent consultant for two years, utilising what he had learned as a technician and junior manager earlier in his career. In 1999 he was headhunted by the biggest direct mail organisation in the UK to develop their website full time and gained enormous insight into the direct mail industry.

At the turn of the century he moved on to work as an Internet developer for a large and respected UK press organisation, working daily with journalists to create compelling websites with daily readerships numbering 250,000 people and millions of page impressions.

This was where he got his first experiences with web measurement tools and because of his background with direct mail began measured testing and experimenting with copy and content.

In May 2001 Steve moved to Finland to marry, and began working as an Internet marketing consultant for a hi-technology Internet firm in Turku where he still lives today. Currently Steve is CEO of Aboavista and a respected writer for a number of web and ordinary publications as well as editor of the Conversion Chronicles website.

**The greatest thing about learning is that no-one can take it away from you....B.B.King**