

Part V

Measuring Success

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“I understand you’ve found a system to reduce the number of complaints we receive by 50 percent.”

In this part . . .

This part introduces using your blog as a lead generation tool. Doing so requires you to imagine your blog as a sales funnel that directs your visitors to calls-to-action and converts sales on landing pages.

Chapter 12 discusses the sales funnel and how you can optimize conversions from search engine results pages. Differentiating where your traffic comes from is important because it impacts your strategy for attracting, retaining, and converting visitors from each group.

Chapter 13 takes you through calls-to-action — what they are and how they work. You find out how to capture your visitors' attention and measure the effectiveness of your calls-to-action campaign.

Chapter 14 discusses the calls-to-action strategy of collecting visitor information and completing conversions on landing pages.

Chapter 15 is about measuring success of calls-to-action campaigns with analytics. Proving success of a campaign is important to showing the overall value of your corporate blogging strategy.

Chapter 12

Imagining Your Blog as a Sales Funnel

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding your blog
 - ▶ Navigating your blog
 - ▶ Converting visitors into customers
-

Blogs are an extraordinary tool to use for raising awareness of your company's expertise, products, and services. However, too many companies abandon blogging when it doesn't generate the business they expect. The problem typically isn't the fault of the blog; the company simply hasn't developed an inbound marketing strategy for the blog.

A typical blog might obtain 40 percent to 60 percent of its average daily traffic of new visitors from search engines and referrals from social media Web sites. Understanding who these new visitors are, how they arrived at your blog, and what motivated them to visit is critical if you want to convert them into customers.

If you have a great corporate blog, chances are the following are true:

- ✔ You understand that blogging is an effective strategy for your organization, and you're committed to all that blogging has to offer.
- ✔ Your blog's platform is secure, flexible, and performs as needed.
- ✔ You established preliminary goals for your blog for acquiring traffic, customers, and industry leadership.
- ✔ You integrated the blog with your Web site, and you promote both throughout your company.
- ✔ You optimized your blog's theme and have a keyword strategy in place.
- ✔ Your well-written blog posts conform to best practices to ensure the reader can easily read and understand the information.
- ✔ Your team is seeing results in both traffic and search engine ranking by keyword.

In this chapter, you begin to visualize your blog as an inbound marketing strategy for your company to generate leads, upsell to existing clients or customers, as well as acquire new clients or customers.

Using Your Blog as a Sales Funnel

Perhaps the first misconception of a blog is that your blog starts with a home page and navigates downward to categories and eventually posts. Although you design and visualize a blog hierarchically, blogs are really quite different. Depending on how many blog posts you've written, your blog has hundreds or thousands of targeted landing pages that attract attention.

Each page independently drives traffic from search engines, social media sites, referring blogs, and referring Web sites.

A *sales funnel*, or pipeline, is a way to visualize your audience online from prospect to conversion. Not everyone becomes a customer in your business and understanding where you lost (bounced) or converted prospective customers in the path they took helps you to optimize your funnel to improve conversions. Each sale can be visualized as a series of steps:

1. Prospects read an excerpt in the search engine results page (SERP), Web site, or e-mail.
2. The prospect decides to click the referring link on that SERP, Web site, or e-mail because it's relevant to the search he made or the topic of discussion he was seeking additional information for. The link takes the reader to your blog.
3. The prospect reads your page and either bounces (leaves), continues to read, or takes action to engage with your business.
4. The prospect clicks an image or link that directs them to do something. This is a *call-to-action*. Common calls-to-action are Download buttons, Registration buttons, Add to Cart button, or other advertisements.
5. The prospect registers his information to obtain access to a download or contact with your sales team.
6. The prospect converts as a sale either on your e-commerce site or with your sales person.

When a prospect advances in each step, this is called a *conversion*. Many online marketers measure conversions by dividing the number of visitors they obtain on their site by the number of visitors who purchase. This is an overly general means of measuring conversions.

If you wish to maximize the potential of your blog, it's important to understand the steps your visitors take and where you lose them along the way. Each step in the process must be analyzed to monitor and improve the overall conversion rate of the blog.

Each step in the sales funnel loses prospects. Therefore, you want to measure what works and what doesn't work at each point in your sales funnel so that you convert more prospects and lose less business.

When a reader advances through each step in the sales funnel, that's a conversion. If a customer advances from a search engine to a purchase on your site, the conversions that happen are as follows (see Figure 12-1):

- ✔ The reader clicks an entry in the search engine results page and arrives at a blog post.
- ✔ The reader clicks a call-to-action in the sidebar after reading the relevant blog post.
- ✔ The reader adds the item to a shopping cart and submits.

If you wish to improve business results, you must monitor and improve conversions each step of the way. The first step is optimizing conversions from the search engine results page.

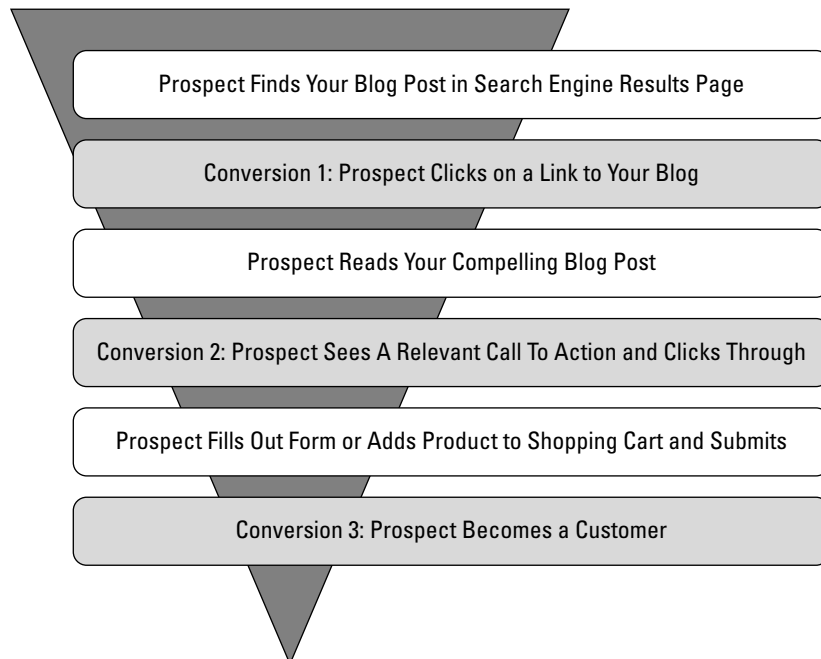


Figure 12-1:
Diagram
of a typical
blog's sales
funnel and
conver-
sions.

Optimizing conversions from the search engine results page

Search engine users use search engines to find answers. They find those answers by entering a combination of keywords and phrases, hoping that the list of results provides them with references to sites that will answer their question.

Search engines are a perfect medium for marketing your business because the search engine user is defining the relevant search at a time when they are motivated to seek out the answers to their questions. By ensuring your content is relevant and placed well on a search engine results page, you're making your business available at the right time with the perfect message.

A visitor acquired through a search engine, then, is more valuable than a visitor from, say, a banner advertisement on another Web site. Marketing is about getting the right message in front of the right prospect at the right time. By being available on a search engine, your company is present for a person when they are ready to engage.

Understanding rank and its effect on traffic

A search engine results page (SERP) provides organic search results on the left and paid search results on the right sidebar. At times, for popular terms, search engines include paid (or sponsored) search results across the top of the organic results.

This book concentrates on Google's search engine and associated tools because Google dominates the search engine market.

Organic results are search engine results based on the destination page's relevance on the topic as well as the page topic's popularity. Search engines organize pages for specific keywords but they rank them based on popularity. *Popularity* is measured by how many other relevant and authoritative sites link to the page. These links are called *backlinks*.

The organic side of a search engine results page typically gets 80 percent to 85 percent of all the clicks on the page. Other results on the page are paid search results, also known as sponsored results. While pay-per-click advertising is effective, organic results can acquire much more traffic.

Blogs are attractive because they provide a platform where you can write content frequently and present it in such a way that's optimized for search engines to find and index. This increases the likelihood that your business will be found organically in search results. Several studies on search engine results page navigation support that the top of the page gets the most results, the next result gets less, the next even less — on down the page.

In fact, being ranked as the first result on a search engine results page means you will get 50 percent to 80 percent of all the clicks on the page.

SEO Researcher (www.seoresearcher.com) has done extensive studies of search engine results pages and found the following:

- ✔ **Position 1:** Results in 56 percent of all clicks on a search engine results page. An additional advantage of this is that searchers spend more time (28 percent) with the first result page than they do with the other resulting pages.
- ✔ **Position 2:** Results in 13 percent of all clicks on a search engine results page with 25 percent of the time spent on the destination page.
- ✔ **Position 3:** Results in 10 percent of all clicks on a search engine results page with 15 percent of time spent on the destination page.
- ✔ **Position 4:** Results in 4 percent of all clicks on a search engine results page with 9 percent of time spent on the destination page.

Recognizing that a move in a search engine results page from position 4 to position 1 is a 1400 percent increase in traffic from the search engine provides a scale of how important rank is to building relevant traffic to your blog from a search engine. Figure 12-2 shows the importance of ranking high on a search engine. Being on the first page for your company's niche is an important factor in your overall authority in the industry; being the first result is exceptional!

Growing your business through blogging requires that you attract traffic to your blog. The most effective way of attracting relevant traffic to your business is by being found in relevant search results.

By identifying and targeting keywords in your content that have high search volumes, you can substantially improve the number of visitors and new customers to your blog and improve your corporate blogging success.

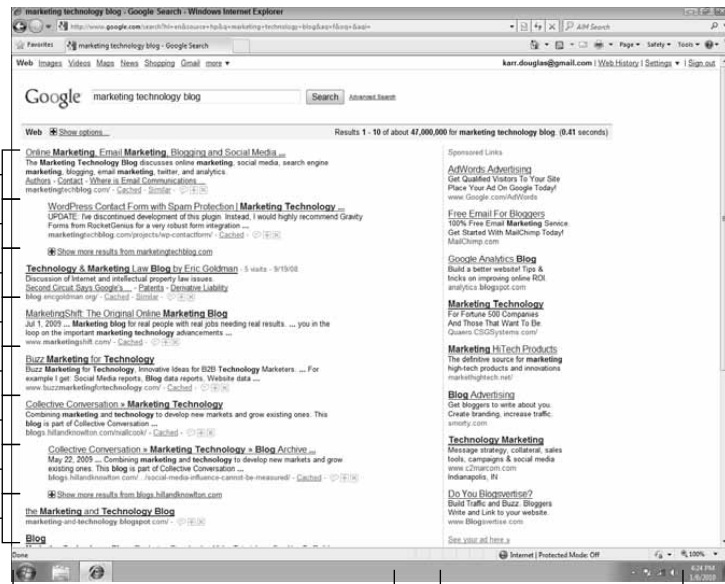
Recognizing how many keyword searches there are, knowing the keywords you are ranked for, and understanding the keywords you convert with is how you can determine how well your search engine conversion rate is. This information isn't found within your blog or fully available within your analytics, though. You have to use a combination of tools, such as the following:

- ✔ Google External Keyword Tool to identify keyword search volumes
- ✔ Google Webmasters to identify the keywords that your blog ranks for and whether searchers are clicking your links
- ✔ Your analytics software to identify the keywords that are attracting traffic and converting searchers into customers

Keyword research is the process of identifying keywords to target, their search volumes, and how your blog ranks on the search engine results pages for those keywords.

Figure 12-2:
Search engine ranking and its effect on search engine result page conversions.

Rank 1
56% of clicks
Rank 2
13% of clicks
Rank 3
10% of clicks
Rank 4
4% of clicks
Rank 5
4% of clicks
Rank 6
4% of clicks
Rank 7
3% of clicks
Rank 8
1% of clicks



Organic search results get ~85% of total clicks

Pay per click ads get ~15% of total clicks

The number of keyword searches is also known as the search *volume*. Reviewing both the volumes and the ranking of your blogs on those keywords is necessary to measure your search engine conversion rate.

Not only do you want to identify your keyword ranking, but you also want to identify new keywords to target that are relevant to your business and have higher search volumes.

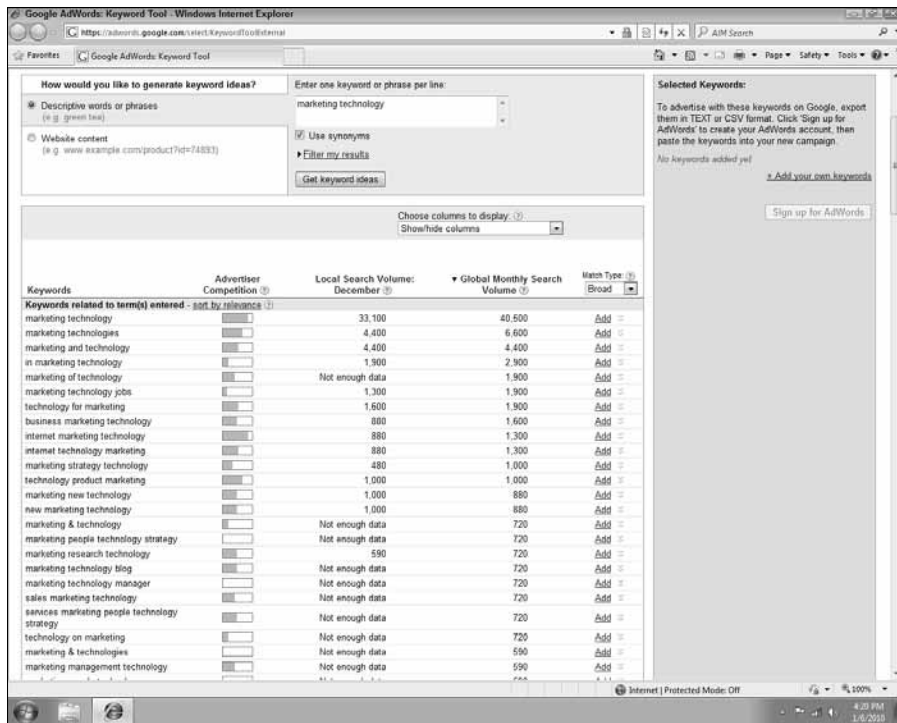
Google provides the External Keyword Tool to provide you with search volumes by keyword. The tool lists keywords, similar keywords and phrases, and their monthly search volumes.

To use Google's External Keyword Tool to identify search engine volumes for keywords, follow these steps:

1. Navigate to <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>.
2. Enter one keyword or phrase per line in the form.
3. Type the characters you see in the picture and then click Enter.

The search engine volumes for the keywords that you are targeting appear. (See Figure 12-3.)

Figure 12-3:
Identifying
search
volumes for
keywords
using
Google's
External
Keyword
Tool.



Using Google Webmasters to identify search engine placement for keywords

Google Webmasters is a resource that Google has provided to monitor how Google's search engine is interacting with your site or blog. Bing has followed Google's lead, providing Bing Webmasters. Yahoo! also has Yahoo! Site Explorer.

Google Webmasters can provide a lot of information that your analytics engine can not. Analytics is only a tool for analyzing visitors to your blog. Although analytics is a critical tool, it can not provide information on anything but visitors.

Webmasters tools provide you with information on the search engine results that your blog appears in, not just visitors who click through to your blog. That's key because analyzing search engine conversions requires that you understand the potential for visits through search engines, not just the actual visits. To use Google Webmasters to identify search engine placement for keywords, follow these steps:

1. Navigate to www.google.com/webmasters.

2. Log in to Google Webmasters. (See Chapter 8 for more on registering with Google Webmasters.)
3. Click your blog domain.
4. On the Top Search Queries, click More to see the full list of the keywords your blog is ranking for.
5. Click Position to sort the results by your rank for the specific term.

The resulting data provides you with a clear picture of how you are ranking and what searches you are ranking on. (See Figure 12-4.) Questions to ask:

- ✔ **Are you ranking on terms that are relevant to your business?** If not, you need to incorporate the keywords more effectively in your content.
- ✔ **Are you ranking well on terms but searchers aren't clicking through?** You need to write compelling blog post titles and optimize your blog posts' descriptions in your blogging platform. Many businesses don't even realize that their blog is showing up well in search engine results but they aren't effectively converting those searchers into customers.
- ✔ **Are you not ranking on anything?** You can troubleshoot why your blog isn't being ranked by using the additional troubleshooting tools within Webmasters.

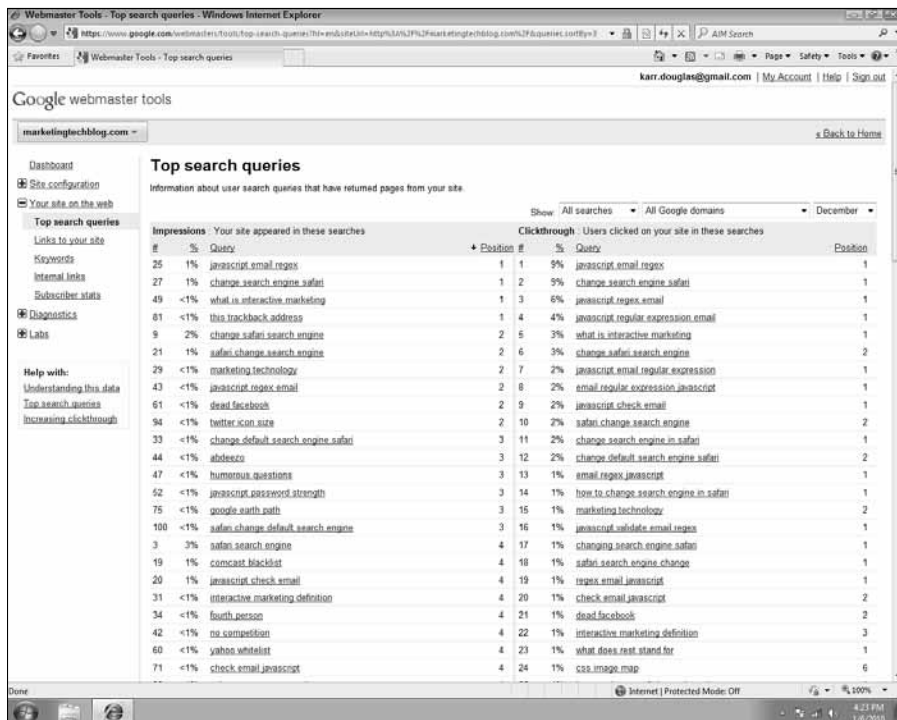


Figure 12-4:
Identifying
your rank
in Google
Web-
masters.

On the Top Search Queries for your blog in Google Webmasters, the left side of the page provides you with the terms you are ranking for in the last week and how well you rank. The right side of the page provides you with the terms visitors are clicking. Webmasters also retains each week so you can compare progress from week to week.

Measure your search engine conversion rate. Search engine conversion rate is the total number of searches for the keywords you appear in divided by the number of visitors acquired through those keywords.

$$\text{Search Engine Conversion Rate} = \frac{\text{Total Number of Searches}}{\text{Total Number of Visitors from Search Results}}$$

Don't be surprised if your rate is extraordinarily low. You must have very high keyword ranking to increase your search engine conversion rate. By monitoring this rate each week, you can develop action plans and processes to improve the rate and the number of visitors acquired through search engines to your business.

Measuring Engagement and Conversions on Your Blog

In the early days of blogging, bloggers used to measure effectiveness of their blog with a term called *engagement*. That is, how engaged visitors were in their blog. Engagement was a difficult metric to capture, so many bloggers used comments as a key indicator of engagement.

Comments have their value on a business blog, but they don't indicate the popularity of your blog in the least when you're measuring your blog's success on the bottom line. For corporate blogs, engagement must be measured in revenue.

Not all revenue is generated directly, though. You may acquire customers directly through calls-to-action, landing pages, or e-commerce purchases on your blog, but you may also have other opportunities. Many bloggers are asked to speak publically on a given topic, for example.

Events and conferences are an ideal means of generating business for your organization. Be sure to account for revenue acquired through events and conferences when you're judging your blogs' effectiveness on your bottom line.

Understanding bounce rate and its effect on your blog

Bounce rate is the ratio (measured in a percentage) of visitors who leave after visiting any page on your blog compared to the total number of visits overall. *Exit rate* indicates the last pages that visitors — who visited either single or multiple pages — were on before they exited your site. So, bounce rate is a measurement across an entire site, regardless of the page that was landed on. Exit rate; however, is specific to the page and only that page.

If two people visit your blog on any page and one immediately leaves without visiting a second page, your site has a 50 percent bounce rate. If a page has four visitors and one leaves the blog from it, your page has a 25 percent exit rate.

Understanding the difference between the bounce rate and the exit rate is important. Exit rate is an issue specific to content in a blog post or page. A blog post with a high exit rate may be optimized for search traffic, but the content isn't compelling enough to keep or convert the customer. Make adjustments to the content of the page to ensure it is compelling and visitors either stay or convert.

You may also have pages — such as confirmation pages — designed to have high exit rates. Because exiting is the appropriate behavior for those pages, you need not worry about optimizing them.

Many organizations measure and reward based on the bounce rate of visitors. For the record, a *bounce* is a person who lands on any page on your site and leaves without viewing any additional pages. High bounce rates are not uncommon when your blog attracts a lot of search engine traffic. Bouncing is the typical behavior. Think about the last time you searched or clicked a referring link. Did you stick around, or did you find the information you were looking for, consume it, and then leave?

Most visitors bounce; this is typical behavior on the Internet. Moreover, blogs actually encourage this behavior. Because blogs provide content regularly, visitors to a blog typically don't start with your first post and read through to the final post. Instead, visitors come back on a regular basis and leave after they've read the latest posts.



Sometimes searchers enter the wrong keywords or phrases; other times, search engines index your page's keywords incorrectly. As a result, a visitor lands and leaves because she didn't find what she was looking for. You don't have total control when content is indexed incorrectly (that's why effective keyword usage is so important).

Search engines are constantly changing their algorithms and rankings, too. Unless you've written your content poorly, bounce rates may not be something you can control or place a lot of emphasis on.

Measuring trends versus instances

Bounce rates may not be a perfect metric, but they can still be very useful. You commonly see bounce rates between 80 percent and 95 percent on any given day. As an instance, a bounce rate isn't a compelling metric that requires action. As a trend, however, bounce rates can be very important. Bounce rates changing over time can point to a number of issues.

Bounce rates per page are an effective metric to review, too. Independent bounce rates per blog post can provide you with details on the characteristics of those blog posts. You can find common characteristics between blog posts with high bounce rates and those with low bounce rates.

If your search engine traffic is climbing, you can expect more bounces. If a major site refers to your blog and you receive a ton of traffic, you can expect more bounces. But if all other metrics appear constant and bounce rates are increasing, you may want to take a good look at your content and see if you're missing the mark.

Bounce rates can be measured and monitored in all modern analytics engines. *Analytics* is a back-end reporting system that provides a wealth of information and reporting on the habits and sources of visitors that come to your site.

To view bounce rates in Google Analytics, follow these steps:

1. **Navigate to www.google.com/analytics.**
2. **Log in to Google Analytics.**
3. **Click your blog domain.**
4. **Click Bounce Rate Report.**
5. **Choose Visitors → Visitor Trending → Bounce Rate. (See Figure 12-5.)**

You can employ strategies to stop visitors from bouncing from your blog. Here are a few ways to keep visitors:

- ✓ **Add a Recent Posts plug-in that lists your most recent blog posts (with links) adjacent to the content.** The visitor may read your latest posts if the titles are compelling.
- ✓ **Link to other relevant posts within your content.** If you previously wrote a post about a similar topic, mention it with a link within your post. The visitor may want to investigate the topic further. This is called *deep linking* because the link takes the reader directly to another page deep within your blog.

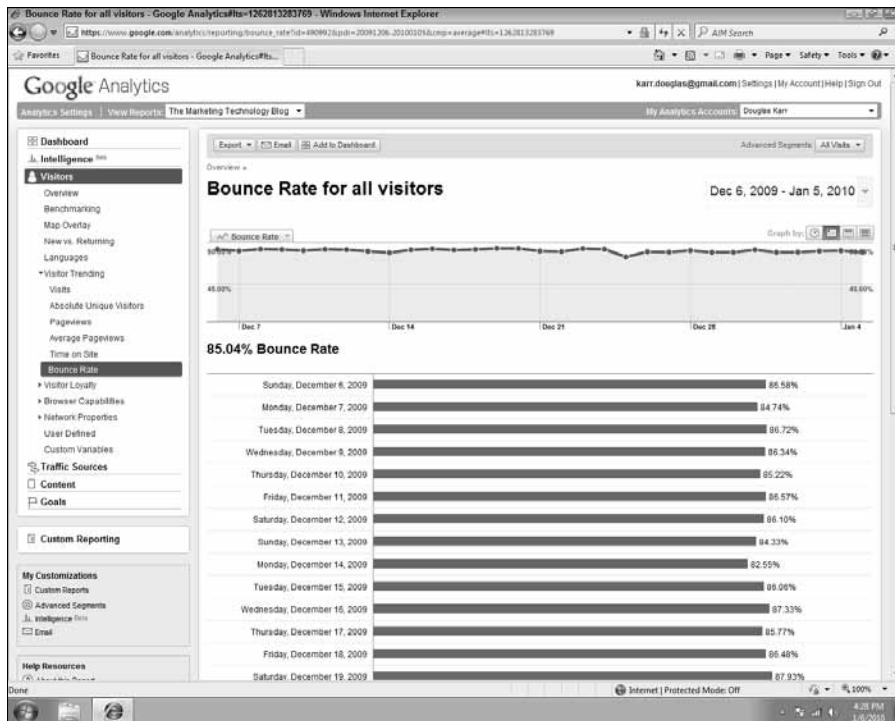


Figure 12-5:
Viewing
bounce
rates in
Google
Analytics.

- **Add a Related Posts plug-in that lists posts related to the same topic.** Over time, you're going to write a lot of content on your blog and you're probably going to cover the same topics with different perspectives, examples, or stories. Providing a list of those relevant posts provides a visitor with options other than bouncing.
- **Ensure that your post title clearly matches your content.** Some blogs and Web sites purposefully mislead people to increase the site's number of visitors. Your business isn't paid based on the number of visitors; your business is paid only when someone converts.
- **If you're providing a call-to-action that drives visitors to an external link, add code to the link to ensure that clicking it isn't counted as a bounce.** With Google Analytics, you can do this by adding an `onClick` event to the anchor tag of the call-to-action:

```
<a href="http://othersite.com" title="call-to-action"
  onClick="javascript: pageTracker._
  trackPageview('/outgoing/call-to-action');">
```

When someone clicks on the call-to-action, Google Analytics tracks an additional pageview for the page found at the path `outgoing/call-to-action`. That path can be anything you would like it to be. By tracking an additional pageview, the visitor is seen as viewing a minimum of two pages. As a result, there is no bounce recorded.

- ✔ **Reduce page load times.** High page load times can affect bounce rates. According to Forrester and Akamai's August 2009 report, (<http://www.getelastic.com/performance/>) e-commerce sites begin to see high abandonment rates when page load times exceed two seconds. That's not a long time! You can make a number of improvements to your blog to increase its performance, but you may need to seek a professional to implement them. A few tools on the market help you troubleshoot slow page load times, including YSlow from the Yahoo! Developer Network; Firebug, a plug-in for the Firefox browser with Page Speed, a plug-in from Google; Speed Tracer for the Google Chrome browser; or an external tool, such as Pingdom.

To check your page load time with Pingdom, follow these steps:

- 1. Along with your home page, select a few pages from your blog to test.**
- 2. Navigate to `http://tools.pingdom.com`.**
- 3. Enter the URL of the page you're testing in the Full Page Test field.**
- 4. Click Test Now and allow the test to complete.**
- 5. Observe the test results. (See Figure 12-6).**

The breakdown of the results provides you with details on each object in your page and how long it took to request and display that object in the browser.

If your page exceeds 2 seconds, you may want to invest in a professional to help improve your blog's performance. If you have excessive gadgets, widgets, videos, and other embedded tools on your site, you may want to begin disabling them.

- 6. Observe the results by item.**

You may find that some scripts or page elements are causing large delays in the page speed. Work with an infrastructure consultant or hosting provider to correct these issues.

- ✔ **Write great content.** Great content keeps people on your blog. Try adjusting your types of posts, lengths of posts, and the topics you cover in your posts to see what effect each variable might have. From time to time, invite guest bloggers who are successful.

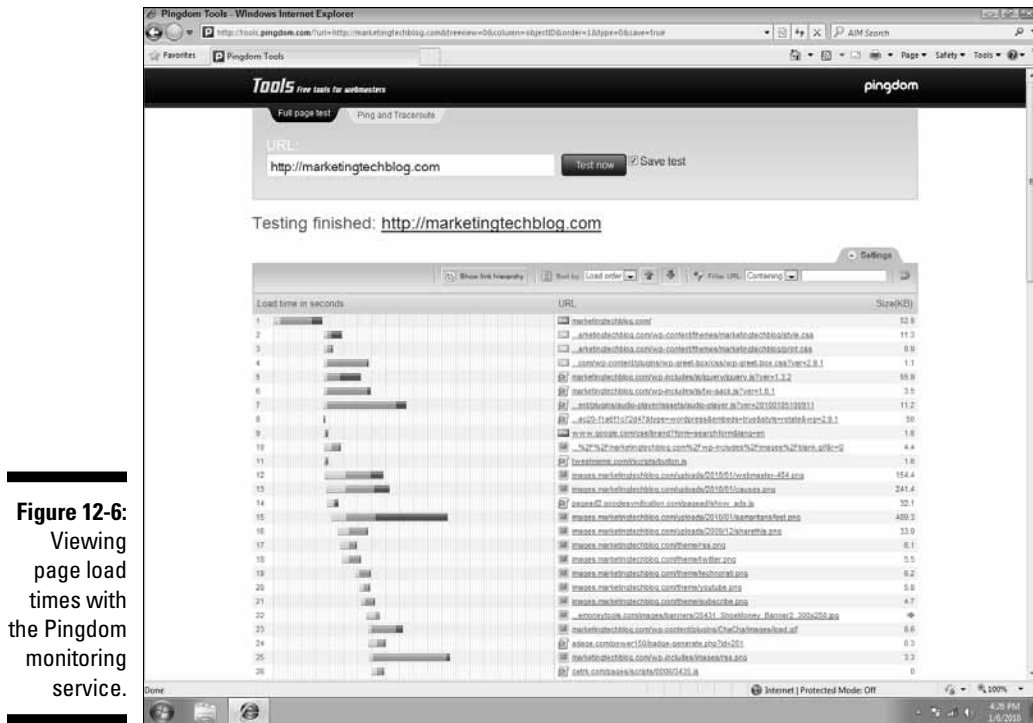


Figure 12-6:
Viewing
page load
times with
the Pingdom
monitoring
service.

Comparing your analytics to industry results

Google Analytics has a beta feature that allows you to benchmark your blog against those in your own industry. This feature can be either extremely useful or extremely frustrating, depending on the results that you obtain. If other analytics users have not accurately classified their site, your results may vary greatly from the benchmark.

Benchmarks are extremely handy when analyzing seasonal trends, though. If your blog is seeing a decline in readership during the winter holidays, analyzing the benchmarks can provide supportive evidence that all industry trends are dropping during that period.

To enable benchmarks in Google Analytics, follow these steps:

1. Log in to your Google Analytics account.
2. In the Visitors section, select Benchmarking (Beta).
3. On the Benchmarking report page, click Open Category List to expand the list of categories.

4. Click the category you wish to compare your Web site against and then click **Select Category** to save your changes.

The report automatically populates the graphs with your selected category's benchmark line. (See Figure 12-7.) Industry averages are difficult to analyze and should be taken with a grain of salt. You'll find that your results will generate unique trends that often do not compare to those on the benchmarked sites. Do not be alarmed; Google has not perfected how site data is classified and how relevant it is to your blog.



Analytics systems can drive a professional nuts. If you apply two competing analytics providers to the same blog, you're guaranteed to get different counts and results. Each analytics company attempts to accurately define unique visitors, time on site, bounces, and other metrics, but the logic each one uses differs.

For this reason, it's much better to continue to monitor your blog's performance over time than at an instant. Stick with trending when analyzing your blog's performance. Pay attention to these trends:



Figure 12-7:
Benchmarks
in Google
Analytics.

- ✔ Is the number of visitors to your blog increasing or decreasing?
- ✔ Is the number of visitors from search engines increasing or decreasing?
- ✔ What are the top referring sites that are driving traffic to your blog?
- ✔ What are the top blog posts on your blog?
- ✔ What are the top converting blog posts on your blog?
- ✔ What are the top converting keyword searches on your blog?
- ✔ If you have multiple authors, who drives the most conversions?

Each week, as you continue to analyze these results, you can monitor your blog's performance and see if it is improving or declining. Analyzing these results will provide you with insight on how you can improve your blog to increase traffic and, ultimately, conversions.

Differentiating traffic sources and business benefits

Many companies either forget or don't take into consideration that Web traffic is composed of many different audiences: investors, employees, customers, prospects, industry leaders, colleagues, and so on.

Understanding who is reaching your blog and what motivated them to read is an incredible opportunity. By understanding how and why visitors arrived, you can target content directly to those visitors. Dynamic content (content which changes and customizes based on the visitor and the information known about them), dynamic calls-to-action, and dynamic landing pages are generating a lot of buzz in online marketing because they display highly relevant content based on the audience they are speaking to.

Optimizing sales and retention strategies for direct traffic

Direct traffic to your site is generally from audiences who already have a relationship with your company, including customers. Web technologies allow you to detect how visitors are getting to your site; thus, you can dynamically change the content.

One example of how companies are using these technologies is to differentiate customers from prospects. Using a customer relationship management tool, such as Salesforce, you can develop a solution that identifies the customer from the prospect. For the customer, you may market the next Webinar or an upsell opportunity. For a prospect, you may market a whitepaper to download.

Placing upsell, training, event, and support information for direct traffic is a great way to fully leverage your blog's layout. By displaying relevant information, you're providing a path to engagement that's relevant to your visitor.

Optimizing acquisition strategies for search engine traffic

Search engine traffic is largely new visitors who are researching your products or services. Understanding how they arrived at your blog can provide you with the tools you need to provide relevant content and calls-to-action. A search engine referral not only provides you with the search engine the visitor arrived from, but also provides you with the keywords or phrases that the person used in their search.

Dynamically generating a call-to-action with messaging relevant to the search terms increases new visitor conversion rates dramatically.

Optimizing strategies for social media traffic

Referring traffic from social media could be visitors from viral campaigns, industry colleagues, your own employees, and customers. Social media sites, such as Twitter, can provide highly relevant traffic to your blog.

Dynamically changing calls-to-action and welcome messages and providing ways to engage with you further, perhaps with a subscription form, can target these visitors with relevant messaging.

An example is a new visitor from Twitter. Using the WP Greet Box plug-in, you can dynamically change messaging for someone who arrived on your blog from the Twitter Web site. Provide them with your Twitter username and a link to your page so that they can follow you. You may not get a sale today, but connecting with you will afford you the opportunity to connect with them again.

The plug-in allows you to do this from a number of sources, including search engines and social media and networking Web sites.

Chapter 13

Directing Your Readers through Calls-to-Action

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining a call-to-action
 - ▶ Designing calls-to-action
 - ▶ Testing and measuring call-to-action performance
 - ▶ Improving your calls-to-action click-through rate
-

A *call-to-action* is a general term for a page item that directs the user's attention to initiate an action. A call-to-action can be something as simple as a link on a page or, more typically, is a bold image that directs the user to click to engage with the blog further. Developing great calls-to-action can significantly impact a blog's performance on click-through rates and conversion rates.

Understanding Why You Need Calls-to-Action

Many blogs leave out calls-to-action altogether and simply rely on the reader to poke around and find ways to contact or make a purchase. At issue is that business blogs often compare themselves to the traditional blog. A traditional blog is a journal-style publication whose goal is to attract as many people as possible. It's all about the numbers. Visitors come to a traditional blog to be entertained or learn from the content and often are discouraged by too many advertisements.

Your business blog is different. The purpose of the business blog is to educate and compel visitors to connect with your company and make a purchase, to deepen their relationship with the company by buying additional products or services, or to improve their overall customer experience so they are retained as a customer.

Your blogging strategy should have three distinct steps:

1. Find visitors.

Build search and promotion strategies that lead new visitors to your blog or return visitors to it.

2. Direct visitors.

This is where calls-to-action are critical. You need to provide paths of engagement for your visitors to go from a blog post to becoming a customer or making a purchase.

3. Convert visitors.

Provide a destination page where they complete the purchase or are entered into a process where they will be contacted by your company for the purpose of starting as a customer or increasing their engagement with your company. (Chapter 14 gives you the scoop on landing pages.)

Your visitor's intent is to investigate whether or not they wish to do business with you. Visitors aren't interrupted (unless it's really in their face) by advertisements on a business blog, they're attracted by them. Whether it's a Buy Now link, a registration, a download, a Webinar, or a subscription, these calls-to-action should be available so the visitor knows where to go next.

Not providing calls-to-action can be incredibly frustrating to a Web visitor who wishes to contact you or make a purchase – so ensure that your path to engagement through your blog is very clear and the visitor knows exactly how to proceed.

Designing Calls-to-Action That Readers Will Click

There is a science to effective call-to-action design. Aside from testing your calls-to-action and swapping them out for relevance, timeliness, and continuous improvement, a call-to-action should have specific elements that ensure that readers understand what they are to do next.

Each call-to-action should have

- ✔ **A single purpose that the visitor is aware of:** That purpose may be to sign up for a weekly newsletter, sign up for a demonstration, download a whitepaper, contact a salesperson, or even add a product to a shopping cart.
- ✔ **A benefit or list of benefits for the visitor:** You must provide visitors the reason they should take action and click-through a call-to-action. If it's a weekly newspaper, perhaps you're sharing industry best practices or the latest news. If it's a demonstration, perhaps it's to learn why your application is different. If it's a whitepaper, tell the visitor what questions

are going to be answered. And if it's a product, let the visitor know what benefit she can get from the purchase.

- ✓ **A command:** Do not leave any subjectivity to your call to action. It's important that you let visitors know what you expect them to do and when you expect them to do it. For example, *Subscribe Now*, *Register Now*, *Download Now*, *Add to Shopping Cart Now*. If it's an offer that expires, count down the time for them, providing them with a sense of urgency.
- ✓ **A place to click:** The last element is the place to click. Display a graphical button or the pointer of a mouse. This element should be obvious but not overly ridiculous. Jiggling pictures and flashing colors takes the attention off your content prematurely — don't be tempted to use these.

Many sites have compelling calls-to-action but don't provide any imagery that communicates that the user is expected to click there. Visitors may think it's just an image on your page and may not realize that it's a place to actually click.

If any one of these features (see Figure 13-1) is missing from your call-to-action, you risk losing opportunities and visitor clicks. If you don't write a purpose, people won't understand what the call-to-action is for. If you don't provide benefits, they won't understand why they should connect with you. If you don't tell them what to do, they may not realize it's a call-to-action or they may put it off until later (also known as *never*).

Figure 13-1:
Viewing
call-to-
action
elements on
Lifeline Data
Center's
blog.



Quality content drives conversions with your audience because it builds both trust and authority. Well-designed calls-to-action provide your visitors with the path to engage once they decide that you're the right company to work with.

Finding images that draw attention to your call-to-action

Not all calls-to-action require an image. Compelling text that is hyperlinked can sometimes be just as effective. In fact, you should try to add a textual call-to-action in most of the blog posts you write. A simple example is adding a line or two at the end of a post to invite the reader to contact you for additional information.

Images, however, can be very compelling. Your visitors will remember a relevant image more so than text. To connect with your audience, providing an image with employees from your company is a great tactic. Seeing a familiar face always attracts attention (it's why many brands enlist celebrities).

Getty Images (www.gettyimages.com) and its lower-cost cousin iStockphoto (<http://istockphoto.com>) are two fantastic sources of photos. They both provide advanced search mechanisms to find just the right image for your calls-to-action.

As for button images, some fantastic sites offer extremely professional button templates. BittBox (www.bittbox.com) is a professional design site that educates graphic designers in the use of Illustrator and Photoshop. The blogger also supplies a plethora of freebies to choose from, all free to use commercially.



If you're at a loss as to where to find images, do not *borrow* them from other sites or a Google image search result. Putting images on your site that you don't have permission to use can cost your business thousands of dollars. Even if you find the image for use on a royalty-free site but the origin was a copyrighted site, your business could still be liable.

You're better off buying or designing the images that go into your site's blog posts.

Keeping it simple; writing call-to-action content

Copy on calls-to-action must be kept to a minimum. Avoid paragraphs at all costs and write in simple, choppy titles, bulleted points, or numbered lists. (Figure 13-2 provides some examples of highly effective calls-to-action.)

Anything more and your visitors will lose focus. The term utilized in the Web industry is *progressive disclosure*.

Progressive disclosure means that I only provide you with enough information and enough elements for you to make a single decision and move on. Many of the most effective Web sites utilize progressive disclosure. A great example is Google, who provides you with a search box, a Search button, and not much else. Only after you search are you provided with more details.

Don't try to be shy or manipulative; sometimes asking your visitors point-blank question gets the best result. Try any of the following:

- ✓ Already a customer? Click here to find out our latest products and features.
- ✓ Ready to buy? Click here to complete the order.
- ✓ Need more information? Our staff is here to help — just fill out a few contact details.
- ✓ Find out how we help! Register and download our latest case studies.



Manipulating your visitors is called *clickbait*, which is accomplished by wording your call-to-action in a way that compels the visitor to click but is dishonest in its messaging. The only goal is to get the click. If a conversion happens after that, so much the better. Although clickbaiting may work on spam sites and other sites not concerned with reputation, there's no place for it on your business blog.

Measuring Click-Through Rates on Calls-to-Action

Measurement on calls-to-action is absolutely critical. Most Web sites and Web designers design a layout, insert some great calls-to-action, and then disappear until the next design. This is a huge mistake. Rarely is the first design the one that's best optimized for conversions. Your site, your blog, your calls-to-action, and your landing pages should all undergo continuous testing and optimization.

Continuous experimentation and swapping out of calls-to-action helps you to optimize your layout and messaging, and it will increase your overall clicks and conversions. Plan this into your blogging administration schedule. Utilizing an enterprise analytics application such as Webtrends, you can even set alerts so that you are informed immediately of under-performing and over-performing posts, calls-to-action, and landing pages.

Implementing onclick events and campaign codes for tracking

If you're without optimization software, you can utilize your analytics software to capture click events manually. Monitoring and optimizing your campaigns manually requires additional resources, but is still worth the effort.

Google Analytics allows you to add pageviews with `onclick` events:

```
<a href="mylandingpage.html" title="My Call to Action" onclick="javascript:
    pageTracker._trackPageview('/cta/cta_name');"></a>
```

In Google Analytics, the `trackPageview` event records an additional pageview when someone clicks the call-to-action. This is a simple way to track call-to-action performance because you can filter your pageviews in Google Analytics for `/cta/` and see how well your calls-to-action perform.

The downside of this approach is that you're actually skewing your Analytics statistics for pageviews, average pages viewed per visitor, and even your bounce rates. You're adding a pageview to each of those elements, so you're going to see some inflated numbers.

To avoid skewing your statistics, Google Analytics provides you the option of building multiple profiles and filtering the data that those profiles capture. To build a profile in Google Analytics:

- 1. Log in to Google Analytics and click Add New Profile in the top right of your accounts list. If you don't have an account, refer to the instructions in Chapter 5 for starting a Google Analytics account.**
- 2. Select the Add a Profile for an Existing Domain option (See Figure 13-2).**
- 3. From the Select Domain drop-down list, select the domain that you are going to measure.**
- 4. In the Profile Name text box, name your profile with the blog name followed by Campaign.**
For instance, I named mine Marketing Technology Blog Campaigns.
- 5. Select your time zone and click Finish.**
- 6. After you return to the Accounts List page, click Edit on the campaign account that you created.**
- 7. Click Add Filter.**
- 8. Create a new filter that includes only traffic to the subdirectory `/cta/` if that's the onclick code you utilized above. (See Figure 13-3.)**

Figure 13-2:
Add a new profile to an existing Google Analytics account.

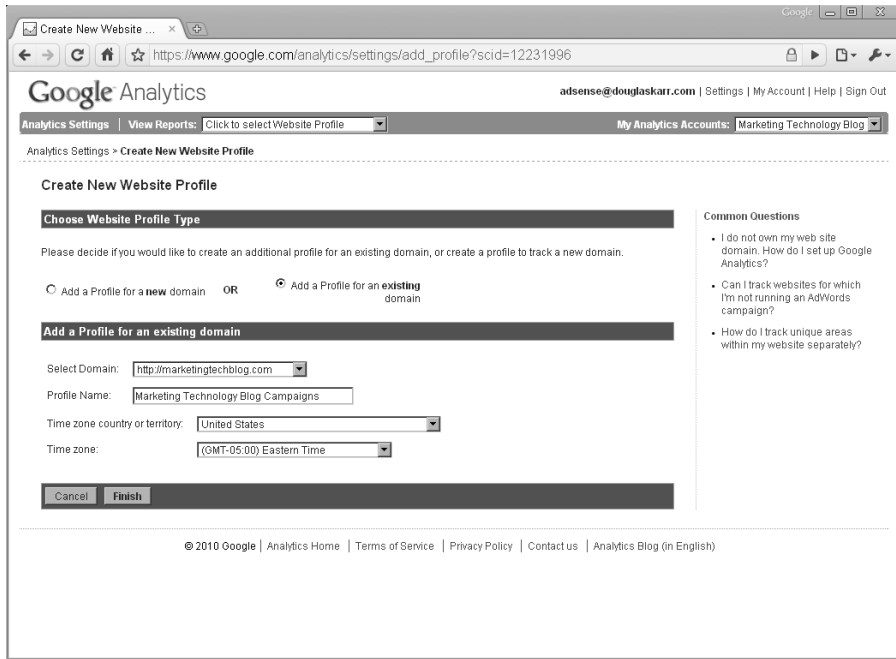
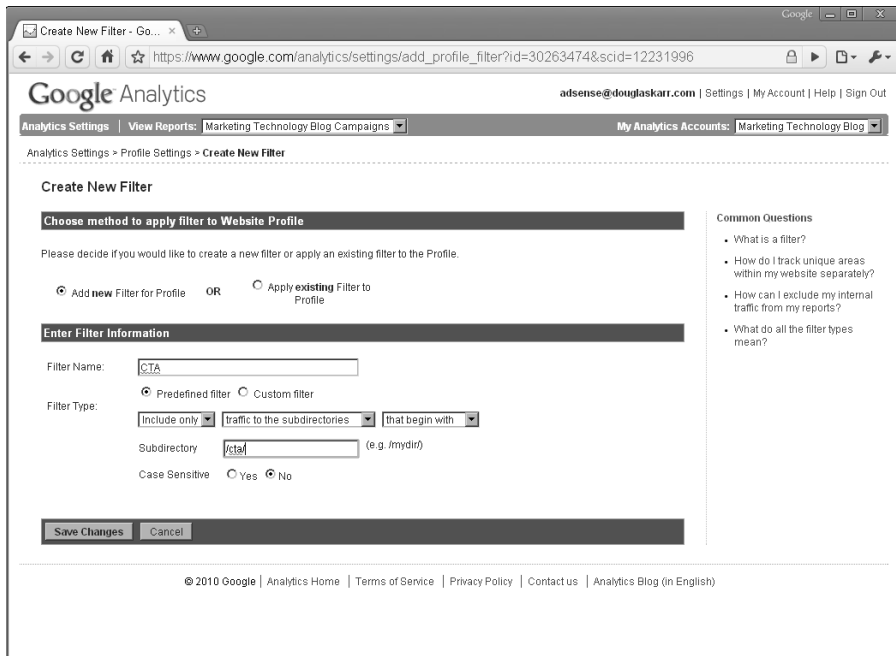


Figure 13-3:
Creating a filter in a Google Analytics profile that captures only call-to-action traffic.



9. Return to your main analytics profile for your domain (not this new profile) and create a filter that excludes traffic to the subdirectory “/cta”.

The result of this is that you will have two profiles, one that measures the traffic going to your site, and one that measures only the clicks on your calls-to-action. If you want to get fancy, you can continue adding custom `track-pageview` events on your blog’s footer (“/cta/start/”+page title), your landing page (“/cta/land/”+landing page title), and your confirmation page (“/cta/finish/”+landing page title+” converted”).

This new campaign profile will accurately measure the campaign-related data while a visitor moves from your blog to an actual conversion.

Another methodology for tracking calls-to-action in Google Analytics is to append campaign code to your internal links. Google Analytics has a tool for you to build the campaign querystring yourself — the Google Analytics URL Builder. (See Figure 13-4.)

`http://www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=55578`

Analytics Help

Google Help > Analytics Help > Tracking central > Tracking basics > Tool: URL Builder

Tool: URL Builder

Google Analytics URL Builder

Fill in the form information and click the **Generate URL** button below. If you're new to tagging links or this is your first time using this tool, read [How do I tag my links?](#)

If your Google Analytics account has been linked to an active AdWords account, there's no need to tag your AdWords links - [auto-tagging](#) will do it for you automatically.

Step 1: Enter the URL of your website.

Website URL:
(e.g. <http://www.urchin.com/download.html>)

Step 2: Fill in the fields below. **Campaign Source**, **Campaign Medium** and **Campaign Name** should always be used.

Campaign Source: (referrer: google, citysearch, newsletter4)

Campaign Medium: (marketing medium: cpc, banner, email)

Campaign Term: (identify the paid keywords)

Campaign Content: (use to differentiate ads)

Campaign Name*: (product, promo code, or slogan)

Step 3

Helpful Information

Top searches

1. how to add tracking
2. IP addresses
3. e-commerce
4. site overlay
5. no data in reports
6. multiple domains
7. subdomains
8. domain aliases
9. goals
10. _trackPageview

Recommended articles

Can I use both Google Analytics and Urchin at the same time?
How do I add tracking code to my website?
How can I help verify that I've setup my goals correctly?
How do I track e-commerce transactions?
What do the different Website Profile tracking status messages mean?

Learn from other users

Find answers, ask questions, and share your expertise with others in the [Analytics help forum](#).

Known Issues

[Report problems or view recent bug fixes.](#)

Figure 13-4: Viewing the completed campaign tracking querystring in Google’s URL Builder.

A *querystring* is the section of a uniform resource locator (URL) or Web address that adds additional data and variables to pass to the page. Typically, you can identify a querystring by everything following a question mark in the Web address. Example:

```
http://www.mysite.com/mypage.html?q=query
```

To build a campaign querystring for a call-to-action in Google Analytics, take these steps:

1. **Open your browser and navigate to the Google Analytics URL builder.**
2. **Next to Website URL, enter the full Web address for the destination page, also known as the landing page.**
3. **Enter Blog or your blog's name in the Campaign Source text box.**
4. **Enter "cta" in the Campaign Medium text box.**
5. **Leave the Campaign Term text box blank.**
6. **In the Campaign Content text box, enter a unique name for your call-to-action that will distinguish this call-to-action from others.**
7. **Enter a unique name in the Campaign Name text box.**
8. **Click Generate URL.**
9. **Utilize this campaign Web address for your call-to-action.**

```
<a href="http://myblog.com/mylandingpage.html?utm_source=Blog&utm_medium=cta&utm_content=redbutton&utm_campaign=summer-specials" title="My Call to Action"></a>
```

If you select three unique calls-to-action to test on the same campaign, utilize the same campaign name but switch the campaign content name. This allows you to measure the overall effectiveness of your campaign, but also to see which call-to-actions perform better.

Building goals in analytics

When a visitor enters the path to engagement through your blog, he takes the following steps:

1. The visitor enters your blog.
2. The visitor clicks your call-to-action.

3. The visitor lands on your landing page.
4. The visitor fills out your form or purchases your product.
5. The visitor lands on a confirmation page.

Utilizing Google Analytics, this can be accomplished by using a feature within Google Analytics named, appropriately, Goals. In Google Analytics, Goals allow you to define the steps that you wish the person to take to monitor their progress. This allows you to clearly see where you have issues in the process so you can correct them. As an example, if very few people are clicking on your call-to-action, you'll want to test new designs and monitor the features and terminology that provides the highest click-through rates.

Follow these steps to build goals and funnels in Google Analytics:

1. **Log in to Google Analytics and Click Edit on the profile you want a goal in. If you don't have an account, refer to the instructions in Chapter 5 for starting a Google Analytics account.**
2. **In the Goals section, click "+ Add goal".**
3. **Name your Goal, ensure Active Goal is turned on, and set the Goal Position to *Set 1, Goal 1* for the page where the CTA is clicked, *Set 1, Goal 1* for the Landing Page, and *Set 1, Goal 1* for the Submission of the Landing Page.**
4. **Select *URL Destination* for the Goal Type.**
5. **Select a Match Type of Head Match**
6. **Enter the Goal URL. If you're capturing the click of the CTA, this path will be the pageview you specify in the `onClick` event, example: `/cta/start`.**
7. **Provide a Goal Value on the submission Goal. This amount is determined by multiplying the average value of each sale by the close rate. If you close an average of 10 out of 100 leads, that's a 10 percent close rate. If the average value of a close is \$200, your Goal Value is \$20.**
8. **Repeat the Steps 2 through 7 above for each of the Goals in your process: the call-to-action click, the landing page, and the submission.**
9. **Add Goal Funnel steps on the Submission Goal. (See Figure 13-5.) Using each of the `pagetrackview` events on your blog, call-to-action, landing page, and confirmation page, fill in each step of the Funnel settings.**

Now you can actually visualize your sales funnel in Google Analytics View Reports → Goals → Overview.

The screenshot shows the 'Goal Settings' page in Google Analytics. The 'Match Type' is set to 'Head Match'. The 'Goal URL' is 'cta/start/'. The 'Goal Value' is '25.00'. The 'Goal Funnel' section is expanded, showing a series of four steps: Step 1 (URL: cta/start/, Name: Start), Step 2 (URL: cta/, Name: Click), Step 3 (URL: cta/and/, Name: Land), and Step 4 (URL: cta/converted/, Name: Convert). A diagram illustrates the funnel process with icons for a shopping cart, a document, a checkmark, and a document with a checkmark.

Figure 13-5:
Goal funnel
con-
figuration
in Google
Analytics.

Tracking and reporting calls-to-actions

Over time, you find that some characteristics of your campaigns work much better than others. You can refine your calls-to-action and maximize your click-through rates and conversions. Rotate each element of your calls-to-action and run each one long enough that you get enough pageviews and clicks to recognize whether or not it's working. At minimum, this should be 100 pageviews.

Follow these steps to view campaign performance in Google Analytics:

- 1. Log in to Google Analytics. If you don't have an account, refer to the instructions in Chapter 5 for starting a Google Analytics account.**
- 2. Navigate to Traffic Sources – Campaigns.**
- 3. At the top of the data results table below the charts, select Medium in the first column drop-down filter and the Ad Content in the next drop-down filter.**
- 4. Filter the data (at the bottom of the data results table) by entering “cta” in the Filter Campaign field, and then click Go.**

The resulting data set and charts provide you with a list of each of your calls-to-action and their performance.



You should always rotate and test calls-to-action to achieve the best results. Some calls-to-action will test better in specific seasons, during business cycles, when adjacent to specific blog posts, and so on. Always test, measure, and optimize your calls-to-action!

Testing and Improving Your Calls-to-Action Click-Through Rate

Testing is something that is seldom planned with a blogging strategy, but resources should be made available each time you are adjusting your offers and changing your blog's design, the calls-to-action or landing pages. Your analytics package allows you measure click-through rates on calls-to-action. Not testing is simply leaving money on the table!

A great resource for seeing the results of testing and how to improve conversion rates is Which Test Won. (www.whichtestwon.com), The blog pits two versions of a call-to-action, landing page design, or content against one another each week and then compares and contrasts the winners and losers. Anne Holland's blog provides example after example where simple layout, wording, color, and image changes have a drastic impact on conversion rates. (See Figure 13-6.)

Figure 13-6:

Anne Holland's Which Test Won provides examples and advice for optimizing your pages and calls-to-action.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Anne Holland's Which Test Won website. The browser window is titled "Anne Holland's Which Test Won - A/B Test & Multivariate Testing Education for Marketing Profess - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar shows "http://whichtestwon.com/". The page features a navigation menu with links: Home, See Awards Winners!, Free PDF Reports, Webinars, Testing Glossary, and 50 Past Tests. The main content area is titled "Test of the Week:" and describes a homepage A/B test where two versions of offers resulted in a 50.2% increase in clickthrough. Below this, two versions of a call-to-action are compared: "VERSION A" and "VERSION B". Each version shows a woman in a car with a "Click Here" button. The text for Version A is "Get Answers to Your Tough Questions" and "Find Local Deals". The text for Version B is "Get Answers to Your Tough Questions" and "Find Local Deals". A "Submit Your Vote" button is present. To the right, there is a newsletter sign-up form and a "See Winners" button. The footer includes a search bar and a "Protected Mode: Off" indicator.

Understanding A/B testing versus multivariate testing

Basic testing can be accomplished using analytics and simply rotating your calls-to-action or landing page elements, monitoring the results, and making changes. Advanced testing can automate and speed up this process, providing marketers with increased conversion rates in much shorter periods of time. For advanced testing, there are formal processes and applications to measure and test features on a Web page to monitor the impact and effectiveness of each element.

Two common types of testing are

- ✓ **A/B or Split testing** is when you display two or more versions of a call-to-action or page layout and identify which one received more click-throughs and conversions.
- ✓ **Multivariate** testing typically breaks up the element into different components and randomly displays the components together. This allows you to design multiple headlines, multiple pieces of content, multiple images, and multiple buttons. The optimization software will display combinations of the elements and provide you with statistics on which combinations resulted in the highest click-through rates (CTRs) and conversions.



Multivariate testing is beyond the scope of this book and requires specialized software to execute and measure the campaigns. Professional testing solutions (such as Google Website Optimizer) and enterprise solutions (such as Webtrends Optimize) provide a robust testing interface where you can test multiple elements on a page through multivariate or split tests to see which ones yield the greatest results.

Implementing simple A/B tests with your calls-to-action

Because A/B tests are simply swapping out versions of calls-to-action, you can manually do this once every few weeks and observe activity in Google Analytics. If you're seeing a difference, utilize the version with better results, and begin to test further enhancements with the same styles that appeared to do well.

Don't be shy about calls-to-action. Test multiple calls-to-action on your page in various places:

- ✓ Within the body of your blog posts
- ✓ In multiple locations in your sidebar
- ✓ In your header
- ✓ In your footer

Varying your calls-to-action and placing different actions that serve different visitors is a great practice. Perhaps your visitor is curious but not ready to purchase — can you supply a newsletter subscription where you can keep in touch with them? Maybe your visitor is doing research — can you supply a whitepaper or case study in return for their contact information? If your visitor is ready to purchase, where can they get in direct contact or make the purchase? Feed each customer's intent with a distinctive call-to-action.

Having several calls-to-action at the same time is not uncommon. One visitor may be motivated by the contest giveaway you're having, another may be motivated by the Webinar you're planning in the next few weeks.

Analyzing results and optimizing calls-to-action

In performing A/B testing, you may wish to start with two completely separate calls-to-action, with different images, headlines, benefits, commands, and buttons. If you do this, you should see a difference in the performance of each. The next step is to vary elements on the call-to-action that received the most clicks or conversions. Build a few versions that are nearly alike with only one element switched out.

On a simple call-to-action, you can even test 27 different versions by varying the heading, the content, and the button.

Keep a spreadsheet and run each version of the call-to-action on your site until each version is viewed 1,000 times. Be sure the views are during similar periods of time so that your click-through rate isn't skewed by another factor (such as a holiday weekend that shortens the work week). Don't just measure the calls-to-action by the number of clicks, either. Be sure to associate the conversions associated with each call-to-action. It's absolutely possible to have a low click-through rate on a call-to-action but have a very high conversion rate on those same calls-to-action. You're not in the business of accumulating clicks with a corporate blog, your blog's performance must be based on conversions.

At the end of the testing, you should be able to identify the best heading, best content, and the best button as well as the combination that performs the best.

Targeting calls-to-action

Targeting is essential as well. If the visitor to your blog is a customer, why would you display calls-to-action enticing them to convert? By asking a simple polling question and saving that information in a cookie, you can then serve a dynamic call-to-action to your customer — perhaps an upsell opportunity or registration to the next customer event.

To set a cookie with JavaScript, place the following code in the header of your blog:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
function Set_Cookie( name, value, expires, path, domain, secure ) {
    // set time, it's in milliseconds
    var today = new Date();
    today.setTime( today.getTime() );

    if ( expires ) {
        expires = expires * 1000 * 60 * 60 * 24;
    }
    var expires_date = new Date( today.getTime() + (expires) );

    document.cookie = name + "=" +escape( value ) +
        ( ( expires ) ? ";expires=" + expires_date.toGMTString() : "" ) +
        ( ( path ) ? ";path=" + path : "" ) +
        ( ( domain ) ? ";domain=" + domain : "" ) +
        ( ( secure ) ? ";secure" : "" );
}

function Get_Cookie( check_name ) {
    name=value, not the other components
    var a_all_cookies = document.cookie.split( ';' );
    var a_temp_cookie = '';
    var cookie_name = '';
    var cookie_value = '';
    var b_cookie_found = false; // set boolean t/f default f

    for ( i = 0; i < a_all_cookies.length; i++ )
    {
        a_temp_cookie = a_all_cookies[i].split( '=' );
        cookie_name = a_temp_cookie[0].replace(/^\s+|\s+$/g, '');

        if ( cookie_name == check_name ) {
            b_cookie_found = true;

            if ( a_temp_cookie.length > 1 ) {
                cookie_value = unescape( a_temp_cookie[1].replace(/^\s+|\s+$/g, '' ) );
            }
            return cookie_value;
            break;
        }
        a_temp_cookie = null;
        cookie_name = '';
    }
    if ( !b_cookie_found )
    {
        return null;
    }
}
</script>
```

A simple poll in your sidebar can ask visitors if they are a customer or a new visitor. Clicking the response sets a cookie with an `onclick` event.

```
<input type="radio" name="poll" value="customer" onclick="Set_Cookie( 'type',  
    'customer', '', '/', '', '' );return false"/>I'm a customer<br />  
<input type="radio" name="poll" value="visitor" onclick="Set_Cookie( 'type',  
    'visitor', '', '/', '', '' );return false"/>I'm a visitor
```

By obtaining whether the visitor is a customer, you can then display the appropriate call-to-action.

```
<script type="text/javascript">  
if(Get_Cookie('type')== "customer") {  
    var customerCTA = "<a href='/landing-page/customer.html'><img src='/call-to-  
        action/customer.png' /></a>";  
    document.write(customerCTA);  
} else {  
    var visitorCTA = "<a href='/landing-page/visitor.html'><img src='/call-to-  
        action/visitor.png' /></a>";  
    document.write(visitorCTA);  
}  
</script>
```

Personalization is a bit scary, but another great opportunity. If you have someone who registered and attended your last Webinar, perhaps the next step is to display an automated chat that routes them directly to your sales team or a call-to-action that encourages direct communication.

Dynamically Displaying Calls-to-Action to Increase Click-Through Rates

Dynamic content is a method used in the e-mail industry to increase response rates that is moving to Web sites. ExactTarget is an e-mail marketing company with a dynamic content engine, allowing clients to change the message and even images in the e-mail to increase conversion rates. It's an incredibly effective use of technology – placing a relevant offer in front of the right audience.

Dynamic content is now finding its way into Web development. An example might be to track visitors to your site and record whether or not they are a new visitor or a customer. That occurs through the use of cookies — no, not the chocolate chip kind. A *cookie* is a small text file that is saved locally on your computer by your browser.

Increasing click-through rates with relevant calls-to-action

When customers log in to your site, you can place a cookie that saves data about them; perhaps their gender, date of birth, last purchase, and account expiration date. When they return to read your blog, you can display a call-to-action specific to them — an offer for a related product or service, or even a renewal notification.

Dynamic content is also an effective use of search engine traffic. When search engine users click your link, the search engine can tell you what they searched for. If a user who searches for a Dyson vacuum cleaner finds your blog post about the Dyson, for example, display a call-to-action that advertises your latest selection of Dyson vacuum cleaners.

Integrating third-party ad serving systems for your e-commerce blog

Building the code to display content dynamically into your corporate blog can be a complex task and requires development resources. You can associate offers and calls-to-action with search engine keywords, specific browsers, dates and date ranges, day of the week, even the screen resolution your visitor is running. If you capture data about visitors in polls, surveys, registration data, or purchases, you can even dynamically display offers that way.

Third-party ad serving engines can also help. iGoDigital (www.igodigital.com) can target specific products to specific readers of your blog on a variety of data elements. (See Figure 13-7.) Ad service engines can be expensive and typically charge by the number of impressions that your advertisement gets.



An *impression* is a count of the times your advertisement is served to visitors.

Some third-party ad serving engines can also serve calls-to-action based on your activities on other sites. These days, your data is being captured everywhere — by search engines, ad servers, social media sites, and even the software you utilize. That data can be accessed and leveraged to display relevant calls-to-action.

If your company serves business to business (B2B) customers and has an outbound sales team, there are even ways of capturing the companies who are visiting your site. For example, DemandBase (www.demandbase.com) allows you to track the visitors to your site and provides you with the company information based on the Internet Protocol (IP) address they arrived from.



Figure 13-7: iGoDigital is an ad server for the e-commerce industry.

Understanding Where Readers Click on a Web Page

Chances are good your blog is written in English. English-speaking countries typically view pages top to bottom and left to right. You'll find that blogs are typically designed with the sidebar on the right; it's not a coincidence.

Laying out your blog's content to impact retention and conversion

The overall design of your corporate blog can have a significant impact on your readership and conversion rates. Investing in a design that's professional and uses best practices is worthwhile.

Putting the compelling content to the left of your page and the sidebar to the right tells people where to look for what's important.

Putting a call-to-action above the content draws their attention to the call-to-action first, and then your content. Utilize this to your advantage. It could be a quick catch if the visitor is simply browsing and wants additional information.

Placing calls-to-action, either text or images, in-line with your content can draw high click-throughs but may also increase the number of visitors who bounce because of the interruption. A common tactic with publishing sites is trying to get more clicks to make more money not nurture a lead. Use caution when deploying this technique.

Calls-to-action in your sidebar should be laid out in line with your blog posts to the left, putting them into the visitor's field of vision. The blog post should answer the question that the visitor had when they arrived, and the call-to-action should lead them down a path of engagement to becoming a customer.



Although higher on the page is better, don't be afraid to put additional calls-to-action lower on the page or in the footer. (Old school marketers will scream about staying *above-the-fold*, a term that was coined with newspapers for what is printed above and below the fold of the newspaper.)

Luckily, it's easier to scroll down a Web site than to unfold a newspaper. Some e-commerce sites and landing pages that place the actual purchase button at the very base of the page have very high conversion rates. The trick is to test, test, test.

Implementing heat-maps to monitor where readers click

Heat-maps are a tool that provides a visual or graphical representation of where visitors are clicking on your site. These are great tools that provide instantaneous feedback to you on where and how people click on a page. Google Analytics has a Site Overlay tool (see Figure 13-8) that displays either clicks or conversions on your site. The site overlay tool is found in Google Analytics → Content → Site Overlay. This is a great visual method for displaying the activity that's happening on your site as well as where your revenue is coming from.

More robust solutions are available, such as CrazyEgg. CrazyEgg provides a color-coded heat-map (see Figure 13-9) where the click coordinates are captured and areas with high concentrations of clicks are colored red and low concentrations are blue.

You have to actually have something compelling to click on for heatmaps to provide feedback. If you don't have a compelling call-to-action at the base of your page, it may not be the location but the actual design of the call-to-action.

Figure 13-8:
Overlaying
click
statistics
on your blog
in Google
Analytics.



Figure 13-9:
Viewing a
heatmap in
CrazyEgg to
find where
activity is
occurring
on your
blog.



Figuring out what elements are important

Keep notes on each of your campaigns in a spreadsheet, including the campaign name, run dates, call-to-action used, colors, buttons, title, message, and so on. The three metrics you want to measure with respect to calls-to-action are the number of pageviews, the number of clicks, and the number of conversions associated with each specific call-to-action.

This helps you test different headlines, different benefits, different commands and different buttons independently and leads you to design combinations that result in the most traffic and conversions. You may even want to implement a path of multiple landing pages that ask different questions so that you can prequalify visitors and supply the right interaction.

Test and measure your calls-to-action for the click-throughs they receive and the conversions. Having a large volume of click-throughs versus conversions may be a message that your landing page needs some work. You were able to get them that far, so continue optimizing.

It's okay for you to move backward. If you push a new call-to-action live and aren't seeing any results, pull it and rework the offer. Don't waste time; maximize every visit!

Chapter 14

Leading Your Readers through Landing Pages

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding landing pages
 - ▶ Designing landing pages that convert visitors into customers
 - ▶ Testing and measuring landing page performance
-

A *landing page* is a destination where you want to lead your readers. The landing page could be a subscription form for a newsletter, a contact form, a request form for your sales department, a registration form for a Webinar or an event, a submission form to a poll or survey, or even a shopping cart page where visitors complete their purchase.

Landing pages are an extremely important element when designing a blog, a Web site, or an e-commerce application. The landing page is the finish line in the journey your visitors take.

For corporate blogging, the landing page is critical because a blog is a publishing engine. Blogs and blogging platforms weren't designed to optimize conversions, they were built to automate and efficiently publish content to the Web.

As a result, the use of calls-to-action and landing pages has been an effective means of building an inbound marketing strategy for a company. The visitor finds the content, reads the content, decides to do business, clicks a compelling, well-designed call-to-action, and converts through an effective landing page.

Designing a Landing Page That Closes the Conversion

As a destination, landing pages must be optimized to attract visitors, capture their information, and lead them to conversion. All the elements of a landing page are critical — the layout, the use of images and video, the design and length of forms, and the conversion point.

A *conversion* is a step in the process that visitors take to engage with you further. Search engine conversions occur when users click a search engine result to arrive at your blog. *Call-to-action conversions* happen when a reader clicks a call-to-action.

A *landing page conversion* occurs when someone completes the step you want them to on the landing page. Typically, the landing page conversion occurs when the visitor submits details via some kind of form by clicking a button or image that represents a button.

Be sure to test, measure and optimize your landing page, just as you do for calls-to-action, as described in Chapter 13. Most companies simply leave up and running a landing page that was designed with their site or blog. By testing, your company can significantly improve your conversion rates.

James Paden is a conversion optimization expert with Vibrant Solutions. James scoured the Internet and did a blog post on some amazing case studies for companies who tested, measured, and optimized their landing pages. In some cases, companies more than doubled their signups or sales. You can find those studies in this Web article:

```
http://marketingtechblog.com/blogging/the-power-of-conversion-optimization
```

Many companies have experienced Web designers who have impressive backgrounds in user experience and design, but come up short when it actually comes to conversions. Don't trust your conversion optimization to gut instinct and experience. Using analytics (discussed in Chapter 15), test and optimize your landing pages.

Designing the path from a call-to-action to a landing page

Your blog provided the authority and trust that led a visitor to click your call-to-action. The call-to-action had a simple message that provided insight into

the benefits of doing business with your organization. Chapter 9 discusses how to design and implement calls-to-action.

If your blog has more than one call-to-action, you should have accompanying landing pages. If you attempt to cut some corners and build a universal landing page to capture every call-to-action, you won't get the results you hope for.

The goal of the call-to-action is to capture the attention of the visitor and provide them with a path to engagement onto a landing page via the content you write — and ultimately *converting* them from a reader into a customer. To optimize this path, your readers should feel the progression is natural. The calls-to-action should be relevant to the content and compelling. The landing page should be targeted, well-written, and effective.

Checking out the elements of an effective landing page strategy

The five basic elements of an effective landing page strategy are

- ✓ **Design:** Typically, the design uses a visual element (such as a logo or header) that incorporates the same design that the related call-to-action has. Maintaining the integrity of the design is important so that the user recognizes that they arrived at the correct destination.
- ✓ **Message:** Providing a compelling message that entices the reader into completing the form is essential to increasing the conversions. When you write the message, ask yourself, “Why would I click?” If your answer to that question is rich content, folks will click.
- ✓ **Form:** Form design is typically where visitors will make the decision to proceed forward or abandon the process. A form that requests too much information can drive visitors away and a form that doesn't request enough information may leave your sales team without the necessary information they need. Your form may also have a couple of questions that prequalify the prospect, such as how soon they would like to make a purchase or how large their budget is. Strike a careful balance when designing an online form.
- ✓ **Offer:** The offer is the value proposition that you are offering to the visitor. It's the motivating factor for them to actually submit the form. Your offer may be to simply educate them, or it might be to actually reward them. One of Compendium Blogware's most active offerings is a fifty-dollar gift card.
- ✓ **Action:** The action is most likely a form submission. If your form is a purchase, it's the button that completes the sale. If your form is for a Webinar registration, it's the button that submits the registration information.

Knowing your landing page goals and tactics

The landing page strategy has to accomplish three goals for the visitor to fully convert:

- ✔ Provide additional insight into the benefits that you've teased the visitor with an accompanying call-to-action. If you view your landing page and it has navigation, information, or any other element that is not relevant to the precise benefit that you are proposing, you haven't met the goal.
- ✔ Provide a form to capture the conversion or the necessary information to provide your sales team to sell your product or service. On an e-commerce blog, this may simply be the shopping cart page where the person enters credit card information to make the purchase.
- ✔ Provide confirmation after the form is submitted that the visitor has completed the transaction and set expectations on what will happen next. Will someone be in touch? Will the order be shipped? Is there an alternative e-mail or phone number to supply prospects with in the event they need to speak to someone from your company immediately?

A common tactic for increasing landing page conversions is to minimize the number of elements and the number of actions that a visitor has to make. This doesn't necessarily mean that you should minimize the actual landing page, though. Many landing pages with very high conversion rates are actually quite long. Some multi-page processes also work to simplify the conversion process.

Simplicity is key. Your landing page should be enough to acquire the conversion and qualify your lead but never more. After you create a baseline for measuring your conversion rates, try adjusting the elements and adding things like video, audio, images, and customer quotes and then measure the responses against how your standard form performed.

Laying out your landing page

People read from top to bottom left to right, and elements of a page should be laid out the same (see Figure 14-1). The whitespace techniques (described in Chapter 9) that you use for blogging are also effective for landing page design.

- ✔ Leave a moderate space around images so text is not running into them.
- ✔ Keep your paragraphs short.
- ✔ Use bulleted or numbered lists.

- ✔ Use headings and subheadings to break up the page.
- ✔ Bold terms that you wish to stand out to the visitor who's reading the page.

While you may want to defy the odds and layout your page differently, start with a best practice approach and then test against it. You may feel that a very different page acquires more customers, but test and measure against the standard to find out.

Figure 14-1:
A standard landing page layout that uses best practices.



Let visitors know what to expect when they submit their form. If you're going to have a sales representative reach out, then let them know. If they are going to receive a package, let them know how to track it. If they are going to receive a download or a whitepaper, let them know that the directions will be provided to them in an e-mail.

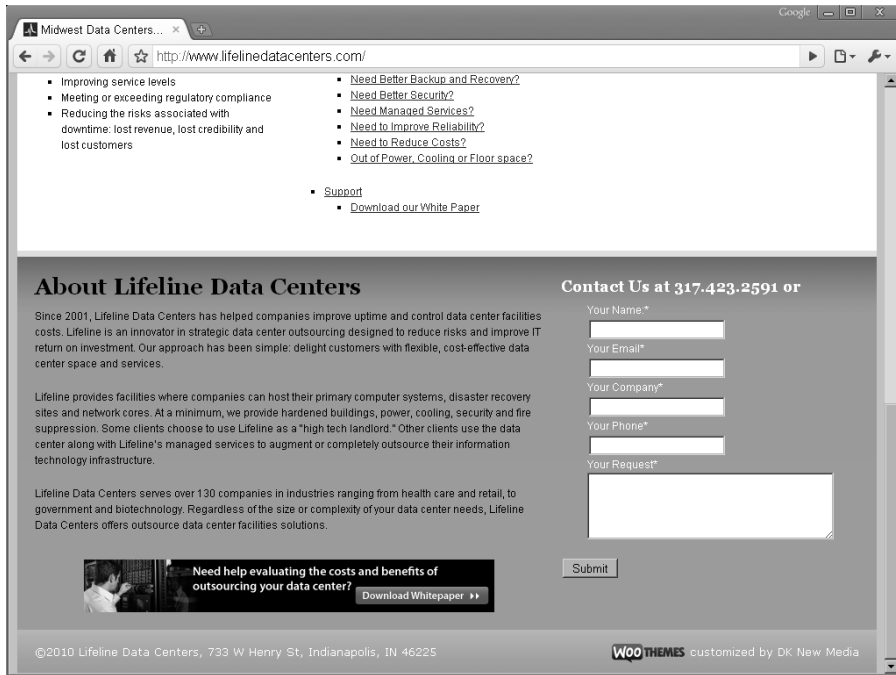
Oh, and be sure to thank them! Courtesy is important when it comes to working with prospects on the Internet.

Narrowing the Focus with Your Landing Page's Content

An effective landing page is designed without extraneous navigation, alternative navigation, alternative product links to click, or widgets and gadgets that dissuade or distract the visitor from what you want them to do. The only action that a prospect should take on an effective landing page is completing the conversion.

Two elements to keep on your landing page are your phone number and a link to a contact form (see Figure 14-2). In the event someone has difficulties with your landing page or it doesn't provide the exact information they require, these are appropriate back-ups. Publishing your e-mail address on a landing page may also be an option, but publish it as an image instead of text — that way the spammers of the world can't harvest it from your page.

Figure 14-2:
Lifeline Data
Center's
blog design
has a footer
with a
contact
form on
every page.



A contact form is something that you'll want to keep obvious on all pages. The contact form may be your greatest means of converting visitors to customers on a blog.



A common design pattern seen on the Web now is a footer. Large footers can provide you with enough room to have a contact form on every page.

Understanding how much information is enough

The central theme of your landing page is to convert your visitor. As such, all information available on a landing page should be targeted toward only that benefit.

Many companies try to fill their landing pages with every product, service, feature, or functionality. They are attempting to cover all the bases. This is a mistake. A landing page isn't a selling brochure. The person landed there because they followed a specific path of engagement. They may have done a

very specific search, landed on a very specific blog post, clicked a relevant call-to-action, and now wish to do business with you — all because they were able to follow the specific path you developed.

Providing different options and alternatives to the discrete path is distracting, and may even allow your prospective customer to disqualify themselves based on too much information. It's fairly common for companies to err on the side of huge, complex Web sites with tons of information about their products and services. This is an approach that is frustrating for readers.

The typical visitor to your blog has a question. Providing the answer builds credibility with your reader. Providing an option for your reader to connect with your company to get the answer through a conversion is a great way to grow your business online.

Trading information for benefits to capture inbound marketing leads

Your blog is an incredible social media platform for connecting with visitors online. When you provide tips, tricks, best practices, industry news, and customer success stories via your blog, you're providing a free service to your audience without asking them for any compensation or expectation.

A common mistake of blogs is to post a download page and provide incredibly robust and detailed product, pricing, and other information without any requirement of the visitor to register with your company. Your blog is free — providing further content should require your visitor to give a bit of their information.

Trade content for data. Offering a trade for visitor information is a strategy that works well. Set an expectation with your visitors that, if they provide you with some personal contact information, you'll provide them with the additional content they're seeking. In a company with an inside sales team, this is the contact information the team needs to reach out and connect with prospective customers.

Providing contact info is nothing new to the Internet. Visitors understand that in the online world they have to give to get. It's important that you set accurate expectations of the content you're making available and then meet those expectations. If you don't, your visitors may feel ripped off and you could have a public relations problem on your hands.

Providing downloads for registration

If you're a software company and can build or provide demonstrations, add-ins, or plug-ins for your application, providing a registration form is a great way of capturing details on your application usage and finding new leads for your sales team.

You don't have to have a complex solution developed for delivering these downloads. A simple form, using a third party form designer like Formstack (www.Formstack.com), can simplify your effort. Simply add an auto-response e-mail to the form that has a specific link to download the necessary files.

Providing whitepapers for registration

Whitepaper is a keyword that is often used in searches when businesses are evaluating industries and vendors on the Internet. If your visitors are comparing vendors, evaluating products or exploring companies, they may be searching for relevant whitepapers.

If, for example, you're an IT management firm, you may want to publish a series of whitepapers on outsourcing your IT; whitepapers on security; whitepapers on industry solutions; and whitepapers on evaluating an IT vendor. When prospects search for information on these topics, they'll find your whitepapers — making you the expert and increasing the chances that you'll be their next vendor.

Having a complete list of industry whitepapers available for download (through a landing page) can get your company found (see Figure 14-3). Be sure to write a blog post each time you publish a whitepaper and describe the purpose, the industry, and where visitors can register and download the whitepaper from (the landing page).

Whitepapers educate the visitor. Perhaps your visitor is simply doing some research for their company to acquire statistics and information on your industry. Providing a robust, informative whitepaper, gives you an edge on your competition.

You can also tailor a whitepaper to your company's strengths. If your competitive advantage is providing a great return on investment (ROI), focus on how important ROI is. If your advantage is your product design, focus on how easy your product is to use and how the industry has awarded you.

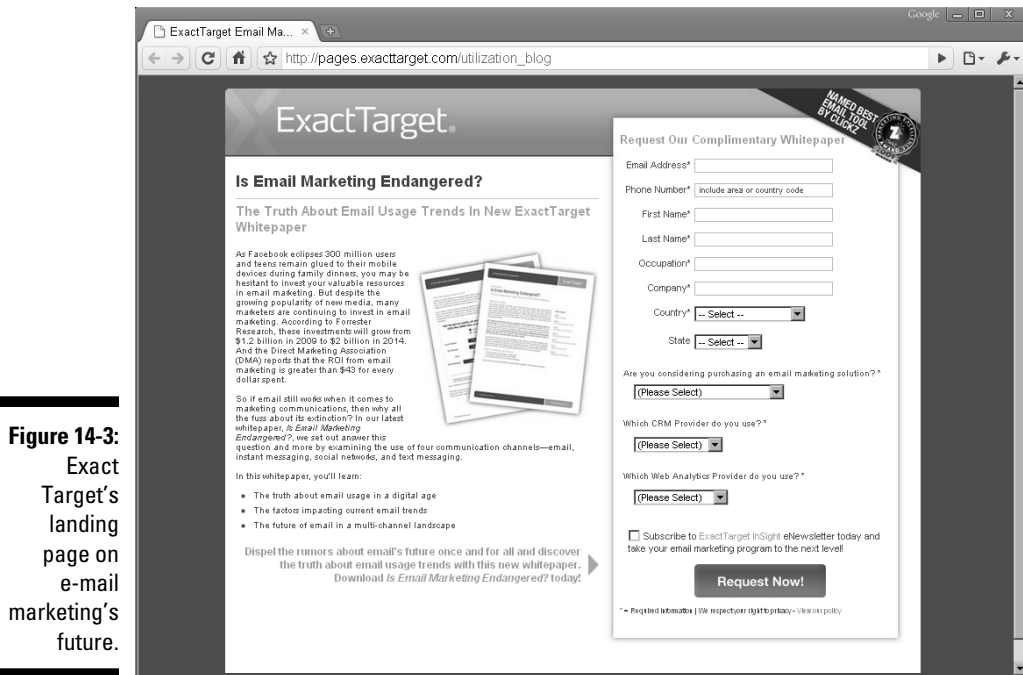


Figure 14-3:
Exact
Target's
landing
page on
e-mail
marketing's
future.

Writing an effective whitepaper takes a bit more effort than writing a blog post. Like a blog post, each whitepaper should have a very specific goal. A whitepaper is much more comprehensive than a blog post, though. Your whitepaper should have the following components:

- **Introduction:** Explain the issue, introduce your company, and say why you're an authority on the topic.
- **Overview:** Provide the reader with an expectation of the whitepaper's content and any opinions you're going to discuss.
- **Supporting information:** Provide as much detailed information, with supporting data, about the issue and the arguments to support your opinion if you've provided one.
- **Why it matters:** Visitors download whitepapers because they want to educate themselves or make an educated evaluation. Provide the details on why this whitepaper matters to their business.
- **Conclusion:** Reinforce the premise of your argument or the lessons learned from your whitepaper. Provide additional information on who to contact and any resources cited within the document.

Sometimes working within the industry, companies tend to overcomplicate their whitepapers by using industry-specific terminology and acronyms. Have a customer or prospective buyer read your whitepaper and provide you with feedback. Is it compelling? Would they want to do business with you after reading it? If the answer is yes, put it on the landing page and get some leads.

After your whitepaper is written, it may be a good idea to work with a designer to optimize the figures and brand the whitepaper with your company. If the whitepaper is distributed, it should be both professional and credited to your company.

Providing case studies for registration

Although whitepapers are about educating prospects, *case studies* provide distinct examples of customer success through the use of your products or services. Your case study should have the following elements:

- ✔ **Title:** Provide a title that is results-driven. Using numerical results adds that extra punch that compels prospective customers to engage with your company. An example might be *Managed search engine marketing services result in a 70% drop in cost per lead*.
- ✔ **Overview:** Your overview should be a discreet summary of the problem and the solution you provided.
- ✔ **Problem:** Provide a detailed explanation of the problem.
- ✔ **Solution:** Define how your product or services solved the problem.

Within your case study, use facts, figures, and quotes directly from the client (with a photo or business logo of them) to fully detail the problem and solution. Be sure to provide a closing paragraph that incorporates details on how the reader can contact your company for additional details or wishes to make a purchase.

Providing Webinars

Webinars provide a safe means for attendees to engage with your company without strong-arm sales techniques. Webinars are much less expensive than purchasing booth space at conferences or paying for travel expenses, so prospects often attend Webinars. The combination of audio and a presentation make the Webinar easily consumable as well.

Here are a few tips for creating effective Webinars:

- ✔ **Select a controversial, timely, or compelling topic.** A great topic gets attention.
- ✔ **Promote.** Discuss the Webinar on your blog and invite people via LinkedIn, Facebook, and other social event systems.

- ✔ **Start and end your presentation on time.** Some attendees will show up late so make the first couple minutes a discussion about the Webinar's purpose, or take the opportunity to do a small audience poll that you can discuss later during the Webinar.
- ✔ **Use a moderator.** The moderator runs the show, introduces you, and captures any questions or comments throughout the Webinar. As the speaker, you don't want to have to worry about all the details; you want to entertain and educate the attendees.
- ✔ **Offer follow-up.** Your closing slide should always provide how the attendee can engage with your company, but you may wish to offer your attendees a distinct offer, discount, or download, too.

Your presentation should be very simple to follow: one idea per slide, not too many slides, stay on target, and lots of examples. Telling stories is the most effective method to make your point (in blog posts, too!).



Presentations make fantastic blog posts. With one idea per slide, and ten or so slides, you've got a dozen blog posts: a post to advertise the Webinar; ten content posts (one idea per slide); and a post that wraps up and pulls it all together.

Capturing the Right Amount of Info on Your Landing Page

Asking for too much information can kill your conversion rates, but the right number of fields can improve conversion rates and provide a sense of whether visitors are good prospects. Strike a careful balance between what you want to know and what you need to know. Remember, you can always ask for more information later — but asking for too much information at first can frustrate your visitor who then will abandon the process.

If you're developing the form yourself, be sure to use JavaScript validation techniques that make your form simple to use. If you require a phone number in a specific format, use code to produce that format automatically when the person enters the information. There's nothing as frustrating as fixing formats and required fields repeatedly to resubmit a form. Make it simple and obvious.

Requesting the right amount of information

Only ask for enough information to contact the prospect or make a conversion. If your landing page is a subscription form, ask for enough information to get the subscription started, but nothing more. You can always ask your prospects for more information later. Asking for it all up front is a great way to intimidate your readers and scare them away.

Don't ask for more than you need. Think about what you're using the information for and the minimum amount needed for the purpose of tracking and prequalifying your prospects.

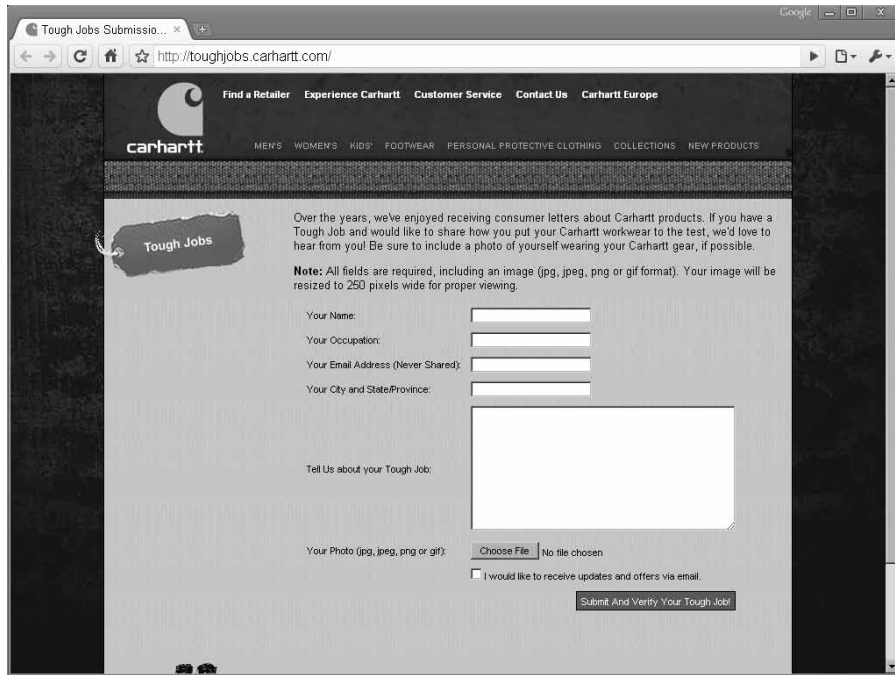
Prequalification is a technique that's used on forms to measure the intent and urgency of the visitor. Some visitors will happen across your blog casually and may complete your registration process simply to attend a Webinar, download a whitepaper, or view case studies. If you have a busy sales team, you don't want to waste their time making appointment after appointment with visitors who are never going to purchase.

Other visitors are truly researching for their next purchase and have both intent and the budget to make the purchase. Asking a couple questions on your form can help you filter and prioritize the leads that are ready to do business with your company. Ask such questions as:

- ✔ Do you have budget set aside for this?
- ✔ How soon are you going to make a decision?
- ✔ Would you like a demonstration?
- ✔ Would you like our sales team to contact you?

These questions provide you with information about the prospect. Those that have budget, those making an immediate decision, those wanting a demo or sales to contact them are prequalified leads. The questions help your lead qualification team sort your leads and prepare for a sales call.

Landing page forms are a perfect opportunity to ask your prospects whether they wish to subscribe to your e-mail announcements or newsletter. E-mail is a proven method for putting you in touch with a prospect multiple times and keeping your business in mind when the prospect is ready to make a purchase. A simple check box on your subscription form that opts prospects in is all that is needed (see Figure 14-4). Default the check box to Yes and be sure to pass an identifier to your e-mail system that the lead came from the blog.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://toughjobs.carhartt.com/>. The page features the Carhartt logo and navigation links: Find a Retailer, Experience Carhartt, Customer Service, Contact Us, and Carhartt Europe. Below the navigation is a menu with categories: MEN'S, WOMEN'S, KIDS', FOOTWEAR, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE CLOTHING, COLLECTIONS, and NEW PRODUCTS. The main content area is titled "Tough Jobs" and contains the following text:

Over the years, we've enjoyed receiving consumer letters about Carhartt products. If you have a Tough Job and would like to share how you put your Carhartt workwear to the test, we'd love to hear from you! Be sure to include a photo of yourself wearing your Carhartt gear, if possible.

Note: All fields are required, including an image (jpg, jpeg, png or gif format). Your image will be resized to 250 pixels wide for proper viewing.

The form includes the following fields:

- Your Name:
- Your Occupation:
- Your Email Address (Never Shared):
- Your City and State/Province:
- Tell Us about your Tough Job:
- Your Photo (jpg, jpeg, png or gif):

At the bottom of the form, there is a checkbox for "I would like to receive updates and offers via email." and a "Submit And Verify Your Tough Job!" button.

Figure 14-4:
Carhartt's
landing
page with
an e-mail
subscription
opt-in.



Your form's abandonment rate will skyrocket if you ask for too much information at first. If you require a lot of information, break it up into multiple steps and provide the visitor with feedback on what step they're at.

As long as you break up the steps into short forms and provide the user with feedback, you should be able to sustain a higher conversion rate. If you're using steps, be sure visitors know what step they're on and how many steps are in the process (*Step 1 of 4*, for example).



Abandonment is the measure of how many visitors landed on your page versus actually completing the form. You will want to monitor this with your analytics package. Adjust your form fields and messaging and test, test, test. Using landing page optimization software, such as Optimize, can provide you with multivariate and split testing, which we discuss in Chapter 13.

Integrating your landing pages with your CRM

Most customer relationship management (CRM) systems offer the opportunity to capture leads from Web forms. Contact your customer relationship management provider for documentation. Salesforce, for example, a well-known CRM platform, includes a method called Web to Lead with their enterprise offering.

Developing your landing page form to post directly to your CRM system takes some proficiency and isn't the job for a beginner. Mapping fields is the process by which you program your form to submit and capture specific form fields in specific record fields in your CRM system. You map form fields to a field within Salesforce to capture your landing page conversions. You can even map the prequalification questions (if you have any) and set your sales team's processes in motion. Contact your CRM vendor for additional details because this will differ with each system.

Doing this provides your company with a clear picture of how your customers acquired through the blog compare to those acquired through other means. Measure their value and their retention. You might find that your blog attracts a lot of leads, but they aren't high value or retaining well. Therefore, you can change your offer and your message accordingly.

Using third-party form solutions to capture information

Designing and implementing forms that capture data is not an easy process. It requires a Web server, development resources, and a secure database. If your company doesn't have the budget or resources to do this, some fantastic third-party tools on the market allow you to build forms and integrate them seamlessly.

Formstack (www.formstack.com) is a subscription-based application that can help you manage your data, send auto responders, and submit form submissions securely to all the people that need the data (see Figure 14-5). The Formstack application provides you with code or HTML to embed in the landing page, or you can even use the end form *as* the landing page.

Follow these steps to build a registration form with Formstack:

- 1. After you log in to Formstack, click Create a New Form (see Figure 14-6).**
- 2. Name your form.**
- 3. Select a pre-built contact form and then click Next Step.**

Figure 14-5: Formstack provides a form builder for contact forms, event registration, purchasing, downloads, and other uses.

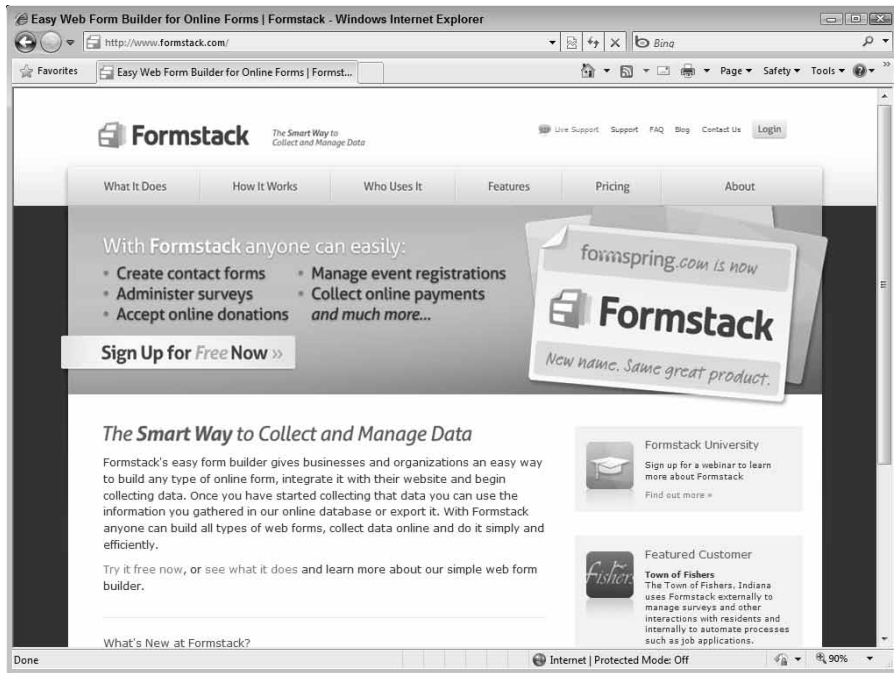
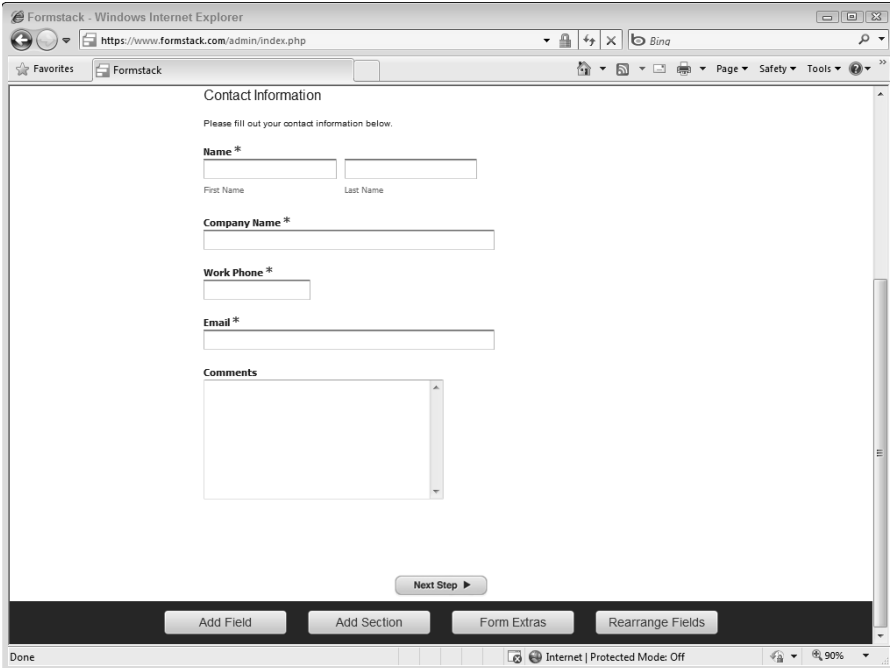


Figure 14-6: Creating a form with Formstack.

4. Click **Add Field** on the bottom toolbar and then select **Short Answer**.
5. Check the **Required** option and label the field *Company Name*.
6. Click **Save**.
7. Move the **Company Name** field below the **Name** fields by grabbing the far right direction icon and dragging the field up (see Figure 14-7).
8. Unless your company requires it, delete the **Address** and **Home Phone** section by clicking the red X on each.
9. Click **Work Phone** and enable the **Required** field.
10. Click **Save**.
11. Click **Next Step**
12. Select a style for your form.
13. Click **Next Step**.

Your form is ready to use! Formstack supplies you with a link or code that you can copy and paste into your landing page (see Figure 14-8).



The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Formstack - Windows Internet Explorer" with the address bar displaying "https://www.formstack.com/admin/index.php". The main content area is titled "Contact Information" and contains the following form fields:

- Name ***: Two input fields labeled "First Name" and "Last Name".
- Company Name ***: A single input field.
- Work Phone ***: A single input field.
- Email ***: A single input field.
- Comments**: A text area.

At the bottom of the form, there is a "Next Step" button. Below the form, a dark toolbar contains four buttons: "Add Field", "Add Section", "Form Extras", and "Rearrange Fields". The browser's status bar at the very bottom shows "Done" and "Internet | Protected Mode: Off".

Figure 14-7:
Adding and
adjusting
fields in
Formstack.

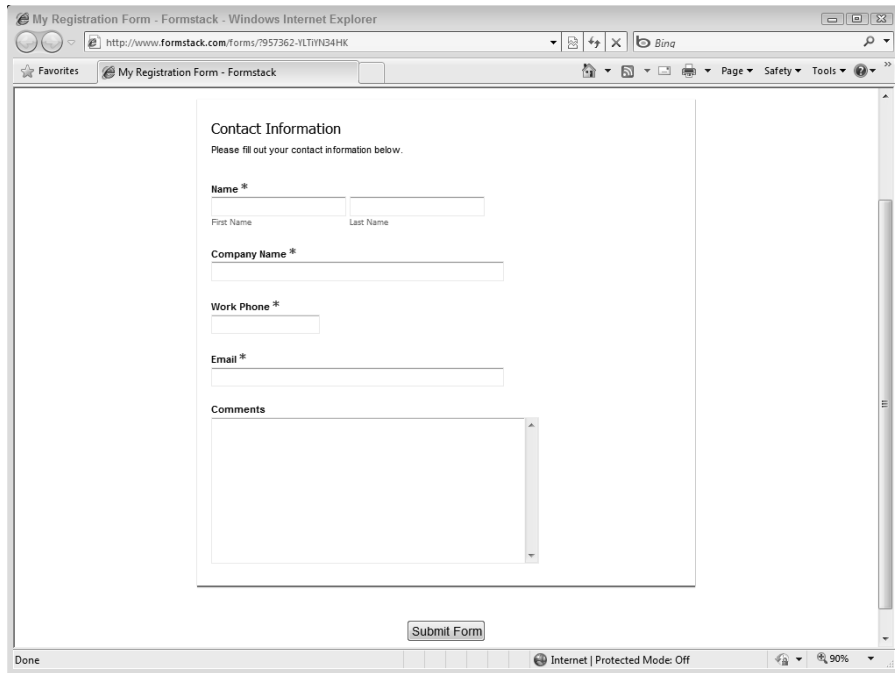
A screenshot of a web browser window displaying a contact form. The browser's address bar shows the URL "http://www.formstack.com/forms/7957362-VLTWNG4HK". The form is titled "Contact Information" and includes a sub-header "Please fill out your contact information below." The form fields are: "Name *" (split into "First Name" and "Last Name"), "Company Name *", "Work Phone *", "Email *", and "Comments" (a text area). A "Submit Form" button is located at the bottom of the form. The browser's status bar at the bottom indicates "Done" and "Internet | Protected Mode: Off".

Figure 14-8:
A simple
contact
form com-
pleted using
Formstack.

Formstack can integrate with CampaignMonitor, Email Center Pro, ExactTarget, FreshBooks, Google Apps, Highrise, MailChimp, Salesforce.com, and TypePad. If you want your data saved to any of these applications, select the option on your form entries. Formstack also has a host of other integration tools.

If you're using a WordPress blog, Gravity Forms (www.gravityforms.com) is a plug-in with extensive capabilities that stores the data in your WordPress database.

While implementing your landing page strategy, be sure to allow it enough time to gather visitors (in the hundreds or thousands) so that you can accurately validate the findings of testing different versions. You can attempt wholesale design changes on your landing pages from time to time, but try to keep your process logical.

Test different layouts, headings, images, colors, buttons, and prices. Always keep the design congruent with your call-to-actions and overall branding of your company.

Chapter 15

Measuring Success with Analytics

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding standard analytics metrics
 - ▶ Setting analytics goals
 - ▶ Setting the value of a blog post
 - ▶ Monitoring shortened links
 - ▶ Monitoring feeds and RSS subscribers
-

Aside from your blogging platform, your analytics application is important when building a successful corporate blogging strategy. Analytics provide you insight into your visitors; specifically, how they are getting to your blog, what they are reading on your blog, and what actions they are taking while they visit your blog.

There are several analytics platforms on the market to choose from, including the following:

- ✔ **Alterian Webjourney** (www.alterian.com/products/web-analytics): Enterprise-level analytics application
- ✔ **Clicky** (www.getclicky.com): Optimized for small blogs with real-time statistics
- ✔ **CoreMetrics** (www.coremetrics.com): Enterprise-level analytics application
- ✔ **Google Analytics** (www.google.com/analytics): Free analytics application from Google
- ✔ **Omniiture** (www.omniiture.com): Enterprise-level analytics application
- ✔ **Webtrends** (www.webtrends.com): Enterprise-level analytics application
- ✔ **Yahoo** (<http://web.analytics.yahoo.com>): Small business-level analytics application

By recording and observing your blogs' visitors, you will have insight into how to improve your blog to increase overall visitor volume and conversions.

It's important to note that the majority of companies never fully leverage analytics. Most companies keep an eye on statistics but never actually take action based on the results. This is an enormous opportunity for your business to learn how to improve its marketing efforts.

This chapter covers the important things you need to know about your analytics software, the best metrics to track, and the ways to interpret the information your software gives you.

Implementing an Analytics Solution That Works

The key to improving your blogging will always come down to how you measure success. As you dive into blogging, your analytics application or applications will provide you with the insight you need to adjust your strategy or continue steamrolling ahead with sales, fame, and fortune.

To get this insight, many companies prefer to use freebie analytics applications, such as Google Analytics. Google Analytics does a fine job, but it has a rather steep learning curve for the average user, has some fairly confusing metrics, and doesn't measure some significant metrics.

Also, companies often fail to include their feed's consumption in their analysis. Google Analytics does not track feed metrics, so you need to sign up for an account with FeedBurner, also owned by Google. Unfortunately, there's no integration between the two to provide you with all the readership and subscriber data in a single spot.

You'll also need to be able to closely monitor your blog's effect on Web site traffic, e-commerce traffic, conversions, and overall business revenue. Most of those features won't come standard with an analytics package, either, so you might want to invest in a great analytics package with the support and education you need or put aside some budget to invest in an analytics consultant to come help you get set up.

Analytics applications were never designed for blogs. Most analytics programs were developed when people arrived at your site through your home page and then navigated through the site. As e-commerce went mainstream, analytics adjusted and added tracking data for shopping carts. As search engines became more prominent for driving traffic, analytics applications adjusted and started to track search data down to the keyword. Blogs, however, work in a different way than the average Web site. Blogs publish content in multiple places — on the home page, in category pages, in tag pages, in author pages, and on the single posts page. On any given blog, there are several ways that visitors can navigate and find your content.

Analytics applications were typically server-side installed packages that tracked through your server. However, SaaS analytics providers have become prominent now in the market. There's no application to install or maintain — you simply paste some code in the footer of your page, and you're up and running.

Analytics applications aren't there to tell you every detail on every visitor; instead, they capture as much information as possible to provide you with enough information to make decisions. In most instances, the trend is more important than the actual counts. How many visits you had today isn't as important as how many more visitors you had today compared with yesterday, last week, last month, and this time last year.



Analytics applications like Google Analytics don't capture every visitor to your blog. Analytics works by saving data in *cookies*, which are stored files that your browser can access, and then relaying that data through code executed via JavaScript. The data passed is actually from your visitors' browser directly to your analytics provider, not through your server.

If you have visitors that block cookies, clear cookies, or disable JavaScript in their browser, you're probably not tracking them. As a result, if you run ten different analytics packages on your blog, no two will report data the same way.

Translating Statistics to Improve Your Strategy

Analytics allows you to monitor every element of your blogging strategy so you can decipher the results and take action to make improvements. Analytics applications have evolved over the years, too. Although many analytics applications simply monitor the basics — the number of visitors, the most popular pages, the volume of bounces, and pageviews — modern analytics vendors are providing integrated social media measurement, such as e-mail tracking, real-time statistics, robust integration platforms, alert systems, and much, much more.

Analytics allow bloggers and platforms to evolve. Based on readership and conversion rates, platforms can dynamically change related posts, calls-to-action, and landing pages.

Which metrics should you track? The following sections describe the available metrics in most analytics applications and how to use them to improve your blogging.

Tracking visits and visitors

At the root of all blog analysis is whether you have a growing or shrinking audience. Understanding your visitors, whether they are new or returning, and how to adjust your strategy to impact this is key to expanding your audience, and ultimately your business online. Here are a few metrics to track regarding visits and visitors:

- ✔ **Visits:** A visit is any detected visit to your blog. Total visits is a great way to see how your blog is performing over periods of time. To increase the number of visits without increasing your audience, you may experiment with writing more posts per week or even per day. If you post once a week, your visitors will visit once a week, but if you post once a day, visitors will return more often. As well, you'll have more pages indexed by search engines — increasing your opportunity to be found and visited.

By posting content throughout the day, those who follow or subscribe to your blog will return more often. You may increase the number of visits and decrease the time needed to actually convert a customer.

- ✔ **New Visits:** A *new visit* is a visit made to your blog that was never detected before. This could be a visit from someone who typed your Web address, clicked a search engine result, or clicked a link on another site.

Analyzing how new visits are getting to your blog is a great way to increase your traffic. For example, if links from social media sites, such as Twitter, are providing you with a lot of new visits, you may want to promote your blog more on Twitter.

- ✔ **Returning Visits:** *Returning visits* are visits made from visitors who have been to your blog at least once before. Your returning visitors are important because they are your reader base. They may be industry experts, customers, prospects who haven't decided to purchase, or your own employees. Growing your base is a great way to grow authority in your industry.

Some companies that are always after new visits don't ignore returning visitors because they may be fans who will echo the company's posts across the Web. If a majority of your visits are returning visitors, you may wish to poll them to see whether they are already customers. If they are, writing to that audience could be a great retention strategy for keeping them as customers.

- ✔ **Visitor:** Someone who visits your blog. If they visit your blog three times in a day, they are counted as one visitor with three visits to your blog.

Maximize visits by writing compelling, relevant blog posts more often. Don't go too far, though. If you begin writing too often, your audience may not be able to keep up and readership may actually decline.

- ✔ **Unique Visitor:** If a visitor visits your blog several times from the same browser, they will be counted only one time as a unique visitor. Unique visitor counts are often exaggerated because people clear cookies or visit from multiple computers.

Observe the overall trend on unique visitors and watch whether they're increasing. The new visitors who are unique are your prospects!

This metric can differ depending on the application, however. See the section, "Observing trends and opportunities in reporting data," later in this chapter.

- ✔ **Loyalty:** Visitor *loyalty* is the number of times within a measured period that visitors return to your blog. You'll probably find while you gain search engine traffic that the number of visitors who visit only one time is very, very high. That's common.

Keep an eye on visitor loyalty. If visitors are returning only two or three times, you may have to increase the quality of your writing and put some very compelling offers out to attract them to convert.

Your subscriber count on your feed and the subscriber count on an e-mail delivering your content are very effective metrics for loyalty as well. Feedburner can supply you with subscriber counts on your feed. Your e-mail service provider will have list counts.

- ✔ **Recency:** Recency measures how frequently your visitors return to your blog. As with loyalty, keep an eye on this. This provides feedback regarding the desire of visitors to return to your blog over time.

Writing great content may keep them coming back within one to three days. If you see that recency is closer to seven days, then you may want to try to write more often to get people returning or write great posts once a week or so to meet their expectations.

Tracing site references and visitor traffic

Understanding how people are finding and getting to your blog is critical to determine which sources you should be investing the most time and effort in. Don't just keep an eye on the number of visits from these sources, be sure to monitor conversions as well. A site like Digg can send you hundreds of thousands of visitors — but if none make a single purchase, it's not a source worth developing. Here are a few metrics to track to trace your site references:

- ✔ **Referring Site:** A referring site is any site outside of a search engine where a visitor clicks a link that sends them to your site. Keep an eye on referring sites, sometimes they may be people clicking comments that you submitted to other blogs.

Writing a compelling comment on another blog that has huge volumes of traffic is a great way to find new readers. Referring sites may also provide you with some great opportunities to sponsor or advertise. If you see great traffic and conversions coming from an industry blog, you may look into sponsoring some posts or advertising on their blog.

- ✔ **Search Engine Traffic:** Search engines are the one source of traffic that you can definitely affect. You can't make other sites link to you, but a comprehensive search engine strategy can skyrocket your traffic.

Pay close attention to the keywords that are driving traffic and conversions to your blog and continue to build strategies around them. Using different combinations of keywords and synonymous phrases can expand and attract more long-tail searches that drive business to your blog.

Note: You discover a lot about keyword targeting and optimizing your blog for search engines throughout Part III.

- ✔ **Direct Traffic:** Direct traffic is traffic from people who have saved your blog as their browser home page, clicked links from software other than browsers, or typed in your Web address.

You can increase the volume of direct traffic to your blog by promoting your blog aggressively. Promote your blog in all your distributed marketing materials, billing materials, business cards, e-mail signatures, and signage. You can even use a service like Skinit (www.skinit.com) to build a custom skin for your laptop that promotes your business — include your blog URL.

- ✔ **Keywords:** *Keywords* are the combinations of words used in searches that have brought visitors to your site from a search engine results page (SERP). Keywords are important for gaining exposure and visits from search engines. Keywords will also provide you with feedback on whether you are being found for the terms that are relevant to your business.

If you review your analytics and find keywords that aren't relevant, ensure your blog theme is optimized well and that you are using relevant keywords effectively in post titles, meta descriptions, headings, subheadings, page titles, blog titles, alternative text tags for images, title tags on anchor text, and content.

- ✔ **Campaigns:** *Campaigns* are typically custom codes added to Web addresses that indicate to the analytics application that someone arrived to your site from a specific link distributed for a campaign. Some sites and applications, such as Twitter, FeedBurner, and MailChimp, will automatically add campaign codes so that you can track people clicking from Twitter, your feed, or your e-mails.

Use campaign codes in e-mail and really simple syndication (RSS) feeds so you understand where visitors are coming from and how well they convert on your blog. Attach the necessary code to each one of your calls-to-action to track campaigns in your analytics campaign tracking, too, so you can monitor the performance of your campaign independently.

Measuring pageviews and bounce rates

The behavior your visitors take once they reach your site is important. Ultimately, your goal is to design a blog and write content compelling enough that visitors spend more time on your site to find additional information. Once they find value, the chances of them engaging with your company increases. Here are some metrics to track to measure pageviews and bounce rates:

- ✔ **Pageviews:** If a visitor clicks and reads three pages on your blog, that's three pageviews. Many companies view pageviews as an important element that indicates a visitor's overall interest in your blog. A blog, however, is typically attracting someone who is interested in that single post — so you may not see high pageviews.

To increase advertising revenues, some major blogs break up blog posts into two or more pages. This increases the number of pageviews, makes it easier to display more advertisements, and feigns the actual interest visitors have. The real question for you is whether there is a correlation between pageviews and conversions. If conversions go up with pageviews, then you may want to try to impact pageviews.

On blogs, often providing links to related blog posts can increase pageviews as well. If you're writing on a topic often, providing links can draw visitors' attention to those posts and keep them on your blog. If you can keep them around longer, they may convert better.

- ✔ **Pages per Visit/Depth of Visit:** The number of blog pages each visitor reads in a single session is known as the Pages per Visit. Depth of Visit tells you what percentages of your visitors read the provided ranges of pages. As with *pageviews* and the other metrics, keep an eye on your analytics and determine whether there is a correlation between conversions and pages per visit.

- ✔ **Bounce Rate:** A *bounce* is recorded when a visitor arrives at your blog, doesn't visit any other page on your blog, and leaves. That's a single page per visit.

It seems every company is possessed with reduction of bounce rates. As with pageviews, the real question is whether bounce rates correlate to your conversions. If you have a single blog post that is promoted highly on a social bookmarking engine, like StumbleUpon, you could see huge volumes of visits and your bounce rate skyrocket. That's not necessarily indicative of a problem.

High volumes of search engine traffic with keywords that aren't relevant to your business can also cause high bounce rates. Of course, irrelevant traffic can still draw attention to your blog and eventual conversions. You may find your time better spent concentrating on improving your conversion rate than trying to decrease your bounce rate.

Related posts can also help with bounce rates. Because related posts are typically filtered through tags or keywords, a visitor landing on your blog searching for a specific keyword may not find it in the immediate post they've landed on — but may find it in other related posts.

- ✓ **Time on Site/Length of Visit:** The amount of time a visitor spends on your site is very important because it provides you with how long you have to grab the visitor's attention. It's very common for visitors to browse by clicking a link, scanning the page, and clicking off the page immediately.

With very low times on site, you may want to work on breaking up your posts with subheadings, bullet points, lists, and bold terms to capture the reader's attention and help him dig in further.

Evaluating overall performance

The behavior of the visitor on your site provides you with information regarding which elements are important, which elements aren't necessary or need to be optimized. Tracking this helps you continuously improve your ongoing blogging strategy. Here are some metrics to track in this category:

- ✓ **Site Overlay:** Google Analytics offers a site overlay that overlays statistics on each of the links on your blog to provide you with feedback on which links are getting clicked the most. On a static Web site, this is more critical than on a blog because a blog's content may be changing every day (each time you publish a post).

Viewing the positions of your calls-to-action with the site overlay is an effective way of viewing their performance with regard to their placement on the page, though. You may find that your topmost call-to-action performs the best — so combining your best performing call-to-action with the best positioning on the page can increase overall conversions.

- ✓ **Content by Title:** Understanding which blog posts draw the most attention and conversions will help you decide what topics you want to focus your blog's attention on. It will also give you insight into which blog post titles work better than others. You may find that countdown titles perform the best; for example, *Five ways to increase sales results*.

- ✓ **Site Search:** At times, visitors will search your blog for additional information. Every blogging application has an internal search function. (In Google Analytics, for example, it's called Site Search.) To view what people are searching on, though, you may have to turn on this functionality.

To turn on Site Search in Google Analytics, follow these steps:

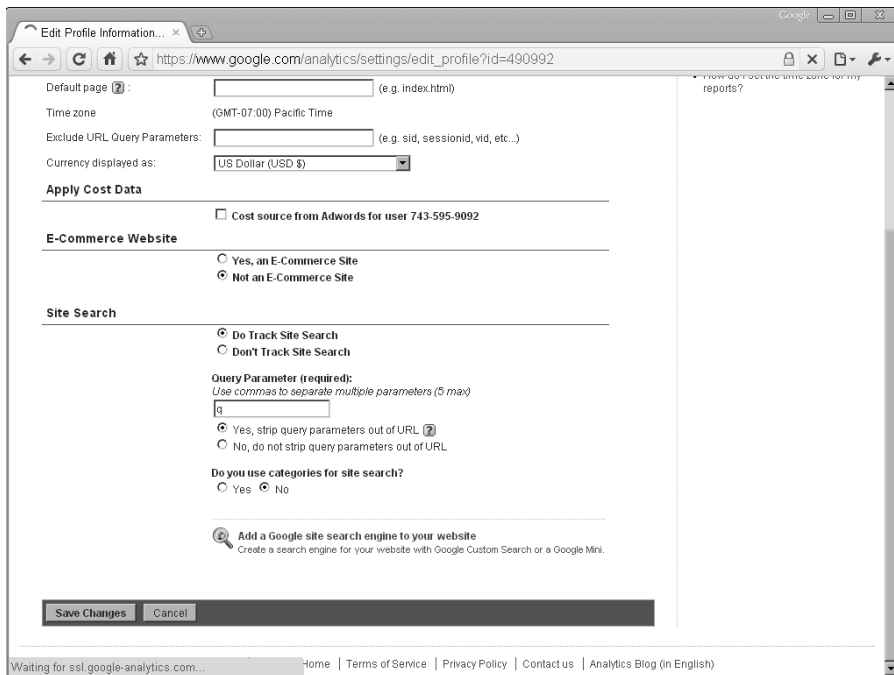
1. Log in to Google Analytics.
2. Click Edit on the profile you wish to enable Site Search on.
3. Click Edit on the Main Website Profile Information panel.
4. Click Do Track Site Search.

Your blogging application uses a querystring to capture searches. Search for your blog and you'll find that the Web address looks something like `http://www.marketingtechblog.com?q=search+phrase`.

In the above example, the query parameter (`q`) needs to be entered into the Query Parameter field so that searches are properly captured.

Searches are a great opportunity for you to identify additional topics to write about. If visitors arrive at your blog looking for information and search for that information, it must be important. Chances are they were unable to find the information elsewhere.

5. Click Save Changes. (See Figure 15-1.)



The screenshot shows the 'Edit Profile Information' page in Google Analytics. The browser address bar displays `https://www.google.com/analytics/settings/edit_profile?id=490992`. The page contains several sections:

- Default page:** A text input field with the placeholder '(e.g. index.html)'. The value is empty.
- Time zone:** A dropdown menu set to '(GMT-07:00) Pacific Time'.
- Exclude URL Query Parameters:** A text input field with the placeholder '(e.g. sid, sessionId, vid, etc...)'. The value is empty.
- Currency displayed as:** A dropdown menu set to 'US Dollar (USD \$)'.
- Apply Cost Data:** A checkbox labeled 'Cost source from Adwords for user 743-595-9092' is unchecked.
- E-Commerce Website:** Two radio buttons: 'Yes, an E-Commerce Site' (unchecked) and 'Not an E-Commerce Site' (checked).
- Site Search:** Two radio buttons: 'Do Track Site Search' (checked) and 'Don't Track Site Search' (unchecked). Below them is a 'Query Parameter (required):' section with a text input field containing 'q'. A note says 'Use commas to separate multiple parameters (5 max)'. Below the input are two radio buttons: 'Yes, strip query parameters out of URL' (checked) and 'No, do not strip query parameters out of URL' (unchecked). At the bottom of this section are two radio buttons: 'Do you use categories for site search?' with 'Yes' (unchecked) and 'No' (checked).
- Add a Google site search engine to your website:** A link with a magnifying glass icon and the text 'Add a Google site search engine to your website'. Below it is a smaller link: 'Create a search engine for your website with Google Custom Search or a Google Mini.'

At the bottom of the form are two buttons: 'Save Changes' and 'Cancel'. The footer of the page includes 'Waiting for ssl.google-analytics.com...', 'Home', 'Terms of Service', 'Privacy Policy', 'Contact us', and 'Analytics Blog (in English)'.

Figure 15-1:
Setting up
Site Search
in Google
Analytics.



- ✔ **Event Tracking:** Google Analytics allows you to capture other events on your site, such as viewing a video. If you embed a video in your blog from a site, say Backlight, you'll automatically see how many times the video was displayed, started, and completed.

You can also use event tracking to capture how many times your calls-to-action (CTA) have been clicked or your forms submitted. The code for the click of a call-to-action is:

```
<a href="mylandingpage.html" onClick="pageTracker._trackEvent('Campaign',  
'CTA Clicked', 'My Campaign Name');"></a>
```

Unfortunately, there's no way of relating events to goal tracking in Google Analytics. If you wish to use goals and set up a funnel, you need to follow the instructions in Chapter 13 on setting up goals and funnels in Google Analytics.

- ✔ **Conversions:** Ultimately, a conversion occurs when a reader turns into a customer. Sometimes, however, registering a conversion isn't possible in Google Analytics, especially if the purchase occurs offline. Nevertheless, in the online realm, a conversion can refer to any specific action you wish a visitor to take.

You might classify a click on a search engine results page (SERP) as the first conversion a searcher takes, then a click on a call-to-action the second, and a submission via a registration form the third. Monitoring conversions is an essential part of your overall blogging strategy.

You need not limit conversions to just sidebars and calls-to-action; you can add links directly in your blog posts that drive conversions. Experimentation, testing, and monitoring the results is essential to maximize conversions on your corporate blog.

- ✔ **Benchmarking:** Within Google Analytics, there is an option to share your statistics by industry to compare your blog to other industry sites and blogs. At issue is that you'll typically find large disparities between the benchmark charts and your statistics. Every blog varies greatly, so there really is no benchmark to measure yourself against. The best means of benchmarking your blog is against itself.

Assessing visitors' language and platform needs

Knowing the languages and platforms your visitors are using helps you optimize your blog for your readers. You want to make sure you're reaching your audience on their terms, not just on your own. Here are some metrics to track in this category:

- ✔ **Languages:** The Internet doesn't have language boundaries, and automated translation services are becoming more commonplace. If your company reaches, or can reach, international clients, then you may wish to enlist a translation service to translate your blog into the target language of your visitors. Beware of automated translators; they still do a very poor job of translating. Additionally, you may want to hire bloggers or use a translation service.
- ✔ **Browser Capabilities:** Many screens are getting wider and wider today with very high resolutions. Taking advantage of this screen real estate may be something you do when designing your blog's theme. Many Web designers design for the poorest resolutions. By doing so, you may actually hurt your traffic with those with the highest resolutions. Understanding your target market is essential when designing your blog layout.
- ✔ **Mobile Devices:** If your blog sees a lot of traffic from mobile devices (or even if it's doesn't), you should optimize your layout for those devices. If you're running WordPress, there's an exceptionally good plug-in called the WordPress Mobile Edition from Crowd Favorite.

<http://crowdfavorite.com/wordpress>

The WordPress Mobile Edition will optimize your theme for both iPhone and iPad Safari browsers as well as other device browsers. With the launch of tablet computers and smart phones, browser resolutions on these devices are much different from desktop and laptop computers. You should optimize the design and readability of your blog for these devices.

Translating Traffic Sources to Opportunities

Understanding where your blog's traffic is coming from is critical when determining how to grow that traffic. While you review your analytics for your traffic sources, you can work to increase that traffic.

Traffic breaks down into the following segments:

- ✔ **Traffic from search engines:** By far, this source offers the greatest conversion opportunities for your blog. Optimizing your blogging platform, researching, using keywords effectively, writing content, and promoting your blog to accumulate backlinks can increase the volume of relevant traffic to your blog significantly. Many blogs see 40 percent to 60 percent of their traffic coming directly from search engines.

- ✔ **Traffic from referring sites:** Sites that link and drive traffic to your corporate blog are important, not simply because of the traffic they drive but also because of the backlinks that search engines index. Referring sites should be reviewed regularly. Referring sites aren't just other blogs and Web sites that are pointing to your blog, they are also social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, and others), social bookmarking sites (StumbleUpon, Digg, Delicious), and other social media, such as Twitter.
- ✔ **Direct traffic:** This refers to traffic from users who are entering your blog's Web address directly into a Web address field in a Web browser. You may not believe that you have a lot of impact over this traffic, but you do. Printing your Web address on all company stationary, business cards, marketing materials and even clothing can increase your direct traffic. If you speak publically or give presentations, put your Web address on your last slide or announce it for the audience.
- ✔ **Other traffic:** You might not believe there can be other types of traffic, but there are. Typically, other traffic arrives through people clicking links in documents, e-mail newsletters, and e-mail signatures. Such visitors don't count as direct traffic because they did click somewhere — analytics just can't tell where unless you take advantage of campaign tracking. This traffic can increase by embedding links in your hypertext markup language e-mails, putting hyperlinks in documents and portable document files (PDFs).

Viewing traffic sources

Keeping a close eye on your referring sources is the first step in determining how to increase overall traffic to your blog. You will want to put the most effort in those sources that produce the most relevant traffic over time.



Many companies look only at the quantity of referring traffic. You do not need traffic, you need business. Be sure not to reverse engineer your conversion information. Instead of looking at what referral source drives the most traffic, look at what referral source drives the most conversions. Increasing traffic on sources that drive conversions should increase the quantity of conversions.

Follow these steps to view traffic sources in Google Analytics:

1. **Log in to Google Analytics.**
2. **Click View Reports on the Web site profile for your blog.**
3. **Click Traffic Sources from the left navigation panel. (See Figure 15-2.)**

This overview provides you with the traffic sources metrics. If you want, you can select Direct Traffic, Referring Sites, and Search Engines to drill down for more specific information.

Figure 15-2:
Viewing
traffic
sources
in Google
Analytics.



Calculating social media as a referral source

The majority of free analytics engines, including Google Analytics, lump traffic from social media in with any other referring site traffic. Unfortunately, that makes it difficult for you to determine how social media is impacting your overall site's traffic. Social media can impact your efforts significantly when leveraged, though.

Because you can't rely on other social media users tagging your links with campaign and source codes, your only option is to filter your list of referring sites to identify the traffic that's impacting it. To filter referring sites in Google Analytics, follow these steps:

1. **Log in to Google Analytics.**
2. **Click View Reports on the Web site profile for your blog.**
3. **Choose Traffic Sources → Referring Sites from the left navigation pane.**

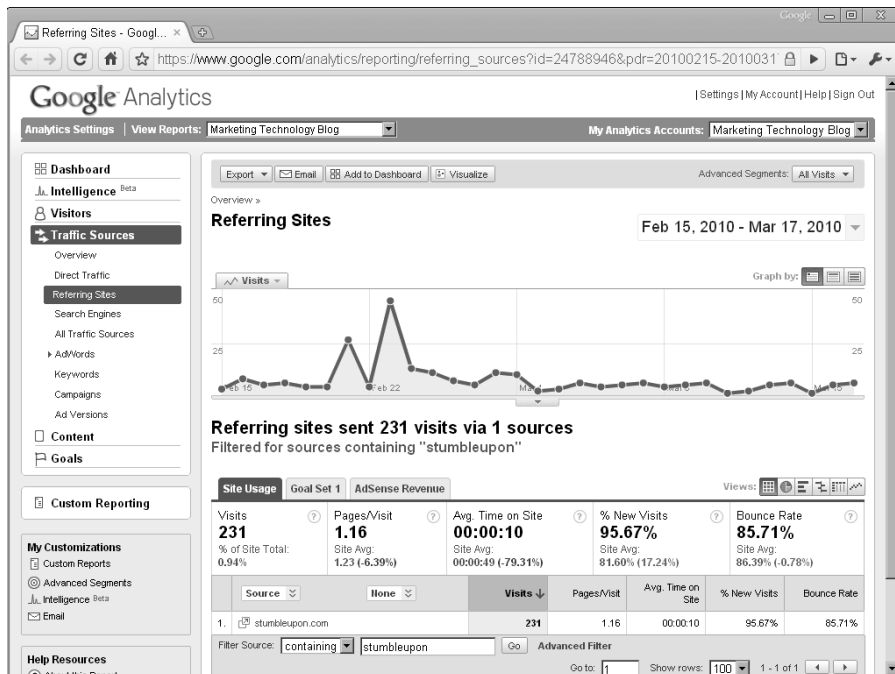
4. In the base of the results table, filter the results using the **Filter Source/Medium** field. Select *containing* as the type of filter and enter the site you would like to view; for example, *stumbleupon*.
5. Click **Apply**. (See Figure 15-3.)

To filter referring sites in Webtrends OnDemand, follow these steps:

1. **Log in to Webtrends.**
2. **Select your profile from your Account Dashboard.**
3. **Select Referring Site from your list of reports.**
4. **Add *stumbleupon* in the search box in the top right (not case-sensitive) and press the Enter key.**

The resulting data compares your visits from StumbleUpon to the preceding period. (See Figure 15-4.) You can select different date ranges if you'd like.

Figure 15-3:
Filtering traffic from Stumble Upon in Google Analytics.



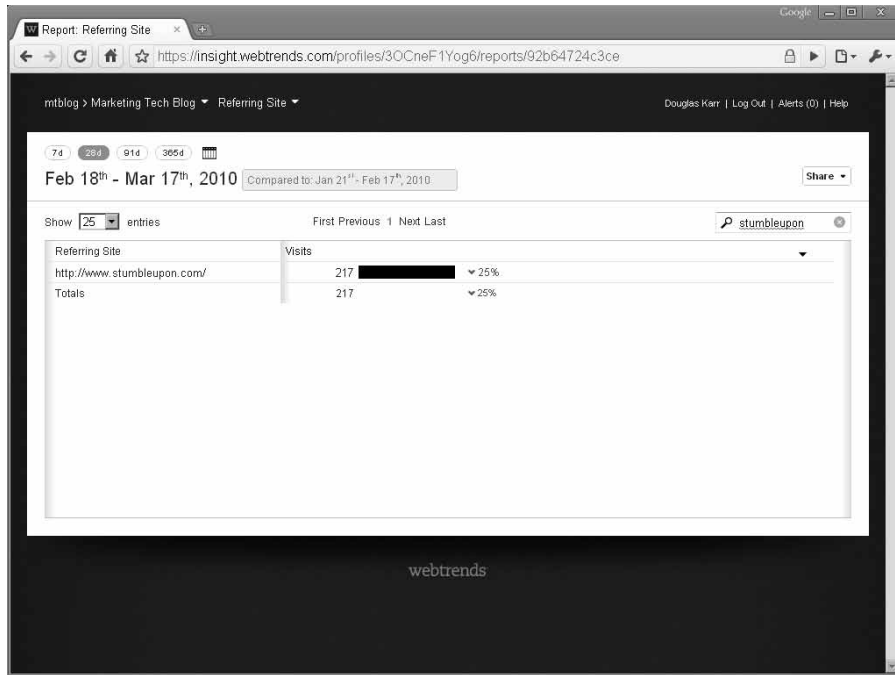


Figure 15-4:
Filtering
traffic from
Stumble
Upon in
Webtrends.

Observing Trends and Opportunities in Reporting Data

If you have the luxury of adding multiple analytics applications to your blog, you'll find that the same metrics will differ on each. Each analytics program measures each metric its own way. For example, the Unique Visitor metric causes much confusion. The logical definition of a unique visitor is one person visiting your blog over the duration of time you're viewing.

However, a unique visitor is actually measured with respect to a browser. If you open two different browsers on two computers and your iPhone, that's five unique visitors on your blog. The Google Analytics *cookie*, the small text file-saving information in your browser, expires after two years. As a result, if you're measuring unique visitors over two years, your unique visitors count is exaggerated. Many visitors clear their cookies if they run into issues, causing them to appear as a unique visitor more than one time.

Read more about Google Analytics cookies and expiration times at

<http://code.google.com/apis/analytics/docs/concepts/gaConceptsCookies.html>

This is just one example. Some visitors also block JavaScript from running, which stops any tracking by analytics providers like Google. Some mobile browsers don't even execute the scripts that capture visits. As a result, the number of actual visitors to your blog may be higher than you are actually measuring.

You might find yourself getting dizzy after trying to account for each metric in analytics and apply it to visitors. No analytics platform definitively captures every event that occurs on your blog, but the good news is that the margin of error from day to day is fairly consistent. As a result, you're much better off observing and acting on the trends from your analytics, not micro-analyzing day to day changes.

Keep an eye on the highs and lows within your analytics. For instance, if a post is publicized by another blog or site with a major following, you'll find a substantial increase in traffic. (See Figure 15-5.)

You'll want to observe trends from week to week, month to month, and year to year to fully analyze what kind of impact your blogging efforts are making. If you don't, then trends like lower readership and conversions around the holidays may send everyone in your company scrambling.

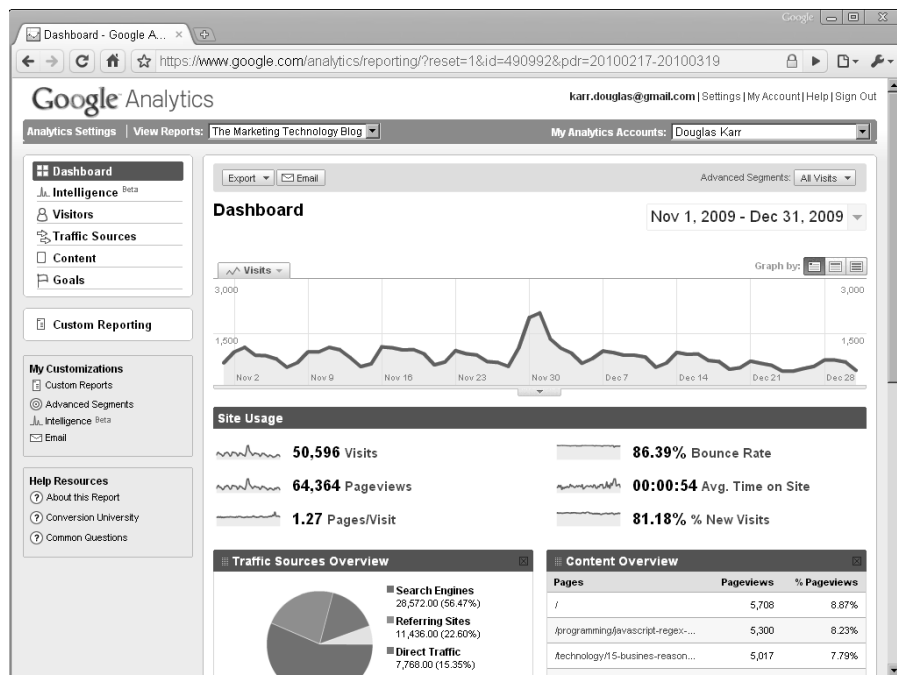


Figure 15-5: Viewing a spike in traffic in Google Analytics after a post is mentioned.

Understanding how your traffic differs from day to day, week to week, and month to month is important and beneficial. For example, if Monday generally garners the most visits to your blog, then take advantage of that traffic and make announcements when you can expect the largest audience.

Setting Goals in Analytics to Measure Conversions

In blogging terms, a *goal* is where you wish to ultimately lead your visitors. For your blog, this could be a contact page, a download, a form submission, a registration, or a purchase. In the process of a conversion on your blog, you can have the first goal be a call-to-action, the next be a form submission, and the last be a confirmation of the form submission. (Sometimes, forms are abandoned if errors arise.)

Goals allow you to view trends across your selected date ranges. (See Figure 15-6.) Refer to Chapter 13 for additional information on how to set up the Goals feature. Setting up and monitoring goals will make it easier to visualize whether your blog is driving conversions.

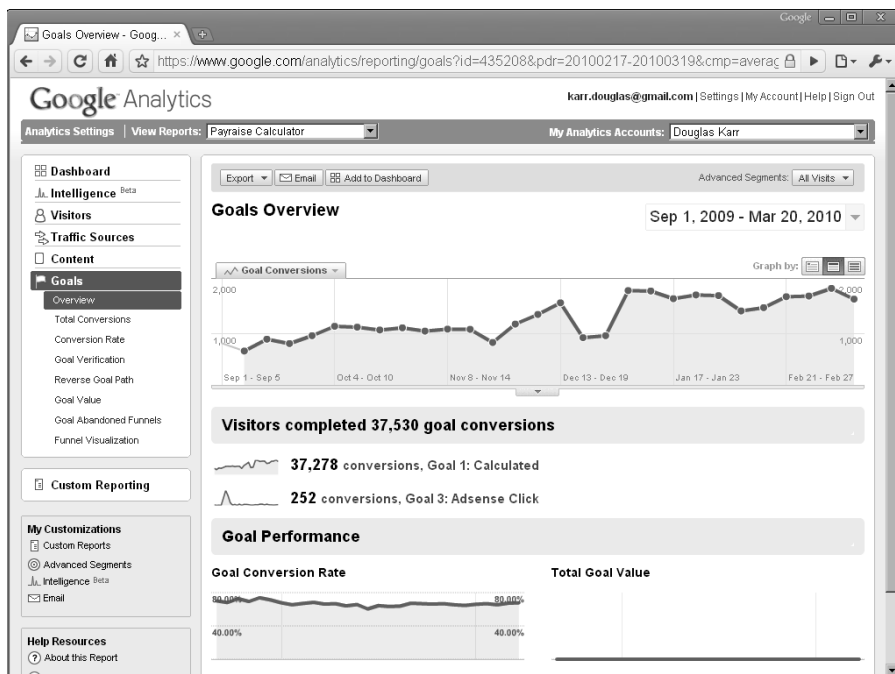


Figure 15-6:
Viewing goals in Google Analytics.

Capturing click events in Google Analytics

The easiest means of visualizing and segmenting your goals within Google Analytics is to capture clicks as actual pageviews. In other words, when someone clicks on a link, such as a call-to-action, you record a pageview that is unique to that call-to-action. The page physically doesn't exist, but you create a virtual page upon which you can then base a goal. (For more on setting up goals, see Chapter 13.) Although this works well for tracking goals, it skews your pageviews, pageviews per visitor, and bounce rates.

If you want to avoid skewing your analytics in your blog's profile, you can add another profile to the existing domain in Google Analytics that is only used to measure your call-to-action performance. To add pageviews for a second Google Analytics account, follow these steps:

- 1. Login to Google Analytics and click Add New Profile.**
- 2. Select Add a Profile for an Existing Domain and call the profile Call-to-Action Performance.**
- 3. Click Finish and record the account code (UA-XXXXXX-X) you are provided within the embed script.**
- 4. Within your footer of your blog and landing pages, find the existing Google Analytics script and insert a second tracking section with the proper UA code for your additional goal-tracking profile.**

Your tracking section should look like this:

```
<script type="text/javascript">
var pageTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-AAAAA-A");
pageTracker._initData();
pageTracker._trackPageview();
var goalTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-BBBBBB-B");
goalTracker._initData();
goalTracker._trackPageview();
</script>
```

- 5. Within your blog's template, on your call-to-action, add the necessary JavaScript to capture the click event.**

Be sure to add this virtual page name to the step field in the Goal setup section of Google Analytics. (See Chapter 13.) The code you add should look like this:

```
<a href="mylandingpage.html" onclick="javascript: goalTracker._
trackPageview('/goal/this-cta-clicked');"></a>
```

You can also add this code to links and images within your blog posts by viewing the hypertext markup language (HTML) code and adding the `onclick` event directly.

- 6. Within your landing page, on your form, add another event to capture the submission and completion of the conversion event.**

Your event should look like this:

```
<form onsubmit="javascript: goalTracker._trackPageview('/goal/this-form-submitted');" />
```

Be sure to add this as the final Web address in your Goal setup within Google Analytics.

- 7. Now one profile accurately measures all your traffic and another profile captures your conversion traffic on your blog.**

Developing custom reports for conversion tracking

Setting goals in your analytics allows you to track specific conversions by defining your funnel from the first click until the goal is accomplished. However, goals are not integrated into the reporting within Google Analytics by default. You must develop custom reports that combine goals with the additional metrics.

One custom report to develop is a comparison of goals to keywords. This report allows you to recognize the topics that drive the most business through your blog.

To build a custom report in Google Analytics that displays keywords versus goals, follow these steps:

- 1. Log in to Google Analytics.**
- 2. Click Custom Reporting** ⇨ **Manage Custom Reports.**
- 3. Click Create New Custom Report.**
- 4. In the Title text box, enter Keywords and Goals and then click Apply.**
- 5. In the Metric section on the left sidebar, drag Goal 1 Completions to the first Metric box below the chart. If you have additional goals set up, add them in the additional metric boxes.**
- 6. In the Dimensions section, navigate to Dimensions** ⇨ **Traffic Sources** ⇨ **Keywords to the Dimensions box.**
- 7. Click Create Report.**

The resulting report provides you a breakdown of conversions by the keyword that led the visitor to your blog.

If your blog has multiple authors, you may also want to develop a profile to track authors and conversions. Using the same technique for tracking goals in a profile, you can also track an author in her own profile.

If you're using a WordPress blog, you can add the following code in the footer to set up such a profile:

```
<?php if (have_posts()) : while (have_posts()) : the_post(); ?>
var authorTracker = _gat._getTracker("UA-CCCCC-C");
authorTracker._trackPageview("/by-author/<? echo the_author_meta('display_
name'); ?>");
<?php endwhile; else: ?>
<?php endif; ?>
```



TIP

If you wish to combine both goals *and* authors, you will need to add pageviews with multiple pageview events to the onclick events for the calls-to-action and landing pages. Example:

```
<a href="mylandingpage.html" onclick="javascript: goalTracker._trackPageview('/
goal/this-cta-clicked'); authorTracker._trackPageview('/goal/this-
cta-clicked');"></a>
```



REMEMBER

These additional pageviews will skew your total statistics with respect to views and bounce rates.

Determining the Value of a Blog Post for Your Company

One of the most common concerns with corporate blogging is finding the resources to blog regularly. Because blogging takes time and momentum to achieve any degree of success, you may be tempted to throw in the towel or move blogging down the list of marketing priorities.

Remember that each published blog post is an opportunity to attract traffic and convert a visitor into a customer. As you publish posts, your odds of acquiring business through your blog improve. One way to justify the resources it takes to blog is to put a value on each blog post that you've written.

As you continue writing, building traffic, and increasing the number of conversions, you continue to add to that value. A typical marketing campaign expires, but a blog post can drive traffic forever. This is precisely why your company must be dedicated to the strategy and continue to stick with it. Companies that give up do so prematurely and before they recognize the incredible benefits that blogging brings.

Measuring lead-to-close ratios with sales

To determine the value of your blog, you must first be able to measure the revenue that is produced by prospects finding your blog, clicking on a call-to-action and submitting their information (or making their purchase) from a landing page.

If your company has a sales team, you're going to capture leads through the use of your landing page. Companies that have a lot of inbound leads typically have a qualification team that might call the prospect to see if they are ready to make a purchase of your product or service. If the lead is ready, they become a "qualified lead" and are sent off to your sales team.

If a conversion from a landing page isn't a true sale, you'll want to keep track of the ratio of leads that actually close a sale. This is typically accomplished through use of customer relationship management (CRM) software such as Salesforce.com, your lead qualification team, and some simple math.

Here are some metrics that you'll want to monitor:

- ✔ **Lead-to-close ratio:** If you get a single customer for every ten leads, then your lead-to-close ratio is 10 percent. Now you can roll those numbers back through your site. If you can get ten conversions for every 1,000 visitors — then you know that it takes 1,000 visitors to get a single customer. Understanding this helps you set expectations for growing your traffic so that you can increase sales.
- ✔ **Total cost of blogging:** Calculate the total budget with the wages spent to blog, the hosting or platform costs, optimization, maintenance, and any consultation or design expenses you incur. Then calculate your overall cost per lead. For example, one blog post per weekday, with your staff making an average of \$25 per hour, and a post taking one hour to write, equates to \$125 per week. Additionally, you may have spent \$10,000 to get the blog set up in the first year.
- ✔ **Blog promotional budget:** Understanding your overall budget also assists you in determining a promotional budget for your blog. Just as you invest time and money on other campaigns, you should also invest in your blog. The additional funding could go to reward bloggers who are driving the most traffic and conversions, it could go to reader contests that help grow your audience, or it could go to external promotion sources that drive traffic to your blog. Your budget should accommodate all three.
- ✔ **Customer service savings:** At the end of each year, you should get these costs and benefits down on paper. If your blog is serving your customers, you may wish to analyze the reduction in calls per customer and overall savings to your customer savings team in with your blogging budget. You will probably even see some improvements in customer retention — a byproduct of opening this communication channel with your customers.

✔ **Average deal size or Average customer value:** As you continue to target audiences and write your content, you must be aware of whether you're reaching the right target. Small deal sizes can be an indicator that you're not speaking the same language or providing the level of sophistication in your content that you should to attract higher value customers. Divide your total new business revenue by your quantity of closes to find your average customer value. Compare deals from your blog with other deals you've acquired. Average customer value is important to monitor whether the value of each close is increasing or decreasing over time.

✔ **Return on blogging investment (ROBI):** Now that you fully understand the costs and revenue associated with your blogging program, you can calculate your ROBI. ROBI is simply a ratio of the revenue produced divided by the marketing investment made over a specific period.

ROBI increases as you acquire more leads and larger deal sizes — and the costs of your program reduce naturally over time. ROBI is a calculation of $\text{Total Revenue} / \text{Total Investment} \times 100\%$. For example, if a blogging program generates \$20,000 and costs \$10,000, there's a 200 percent return on blogging investment.

You need to figure out what the right investment is for blogging to make sense for your company and then push to exceed those goals over time.

Measuring leads coming from your blog

As your blog builds in authority with search engines and you are recognized as an industry expert, your cost per lead through the blog will continue to drop. To keep track of this, you'll want to measure and compare the following two metrics to your other sales and marketing efforts:

✔ **Cost per lead:** Compared to other media, you'll find that blogging is a very affordable inbound marketing strategy — but it takes time to begin seeing the results. The cost per lead for blogging will decrease over time while your readership and authority grows and the ownership costs of the blog decline.

✔ **Revenue per lead:** To calculate the revenue per lead, divide your total new business revenue by your quantity of leads. Compare that number with your revenue per lead from blogging. This helps you further understand how important blogging will be to your overall sales and marketing strategy. Over time, you may find that the revenue per lead from your blog is substantially higher than that of your inbound marketing team or external sales team.

When you are accurately tracking each of the previous metrics, you will be able to identify how blogging is impacting your business and plan resources accordingly. You may even want to begin shifting budget to your corporate blogging strategy as it begins to drive more business than other marketing efforts. Additional budget can supply you with additional content from third-party sources, contests and giveaways on your blog, automation and integration, and rewards for your bloggers.

Measuring conversions from blog to landing pages

In addition to the metrics described in the previous sections, you want to monitor the following conversion metrics:

- ✔ **Search conversion rate:** What is the total number of searches for the keywords that will attract visitors to your business? You can obtain this information through Google's keyword tool. Look within your analytics package and calculate how many visitors arrived through those searches. These are conversions from a performed search via a search engine results page (SERP) to your blog. Achieving high ranking for keywords, writing compelling post titles, and meta descriptions will help improve these conversion rates.
- ✔ **Promotion conversion rate:** If you're spending time promoting your blog through pay-per-click, social media, and other sites, you want a clear picture of the audience size for those sites versus the actual number of clicks that are acquiring visits to your site. This helps you tweak your off-site promotion efforts to increase click-through rates (CTR).
- ✔ **Blog conversion rate:** This ratio compares the total number of conversions on your blog's landing pages to the total number of visitors to your blog. Monitoring this metric helps you understand what impact the quality and quantity of your content has on your overall inbound marketing strategy.
- ✔ **Close ratio:** This is the number of leads compared to the number of closes that your business acquired through the blog. Your close ratio is going to help you determine whether or not your blog is reaching the appropriate target audience. You may need to adjust your keywords if you are not reaching the right audience.
- ✔ **Program conversion rate:** This is the total number of customers acquired compared to the total audience that you've reached. Don't limit your measurement to only people who subscribe to your feed or physically visit your blog through a browser — take the audiences in your social networks, e-mail subscriptions, and total searches into consideration. Once fully integrated and optimized, your blog extends well beyond your domain.

Your conversion rate may look pretty small, but it's still worth understanding. It should show you how a new promotional medium can help your business. If you know that exposure to 250,000 people in social media is driving 50 leads per week to your business, then it may be worth it to engage in a new social media site that is gaining popularity.

Tying it all together — estimating the sales value of your blog and each post

If you can publish two blog posts a week and your blog leads to \$5,000 in sales, each blog post is effectively worth \$50. How does that adjust the priorities of blogging in comparison to your other marketing efforts? Many companies find that their return on blogging can exceed hundreds of dollars per post.

Still don't have time to post? You'll probably change your mind when you begin to see the revenues and costs associated with blogging over a year.

Now you can calculate how much *not* posting is costing your business in new revenue. Calculate your total revenue per posts after a year of blogging by dividing the total revenue acquired through your blog by the total number of posts on your blog.



If your company is getting additional opportunities to speak at industry events because of your blog's authority, don't shortchange your blogging program by not accounting for those leads and the associated revenue. Account for that business within your return on blogging investment (ROBI).

Monitoring Shortened Links with Third-Party Applications

There are Internet services that allow you to reduce the length of Web addresses. These services are known as *URL shorteners*. *URL* is an acronym for Uniform Resource Locator, the technical name for a Web address. TinyURL was one of the first URL shorteners, and many have followed. These days, bit.ly is the most popular URL shortener, owing its popularity to the fact that it tracks the number of times a shortened Web address is clicked.

You might be wondering how URL shorteners impact analytics. Because URL shorteners are simply redirect pages, your analytics application will still capture the referring site rather than the URL shortener domain. For example, a bit.ly link on Twitter that drives traffic to your blog will still show up with Twitter as the referring source.



Not all URL shorteners are built the same. bit.ly uses a 301 redirect and also supplies analytics on the number of visitors who used the shortened link. If you want to use another service, or even develop your own for your company blog, be sure to use a service or code that uses 301 redirects. Although they don't pass all search engine authority, 301 redirects are the best for search engine optimization.

Setting up backtweets to alert your company of mentions

Companies must respond to mentions on social media. Those who do not are assailed online and lose credibility with their customers and prospects. Consumers and prospects expect that companies will respond proactively to defend their brand and to support their clients. To monitor these communications, it's imperative that you listen for the mentions of your company.

Products such as Radian6, Trackur, and ScoutLabs allow you to closely monitor your brands online. Simple tools such as Google Alerts and Backtweets send e-mail alerts whenever your company's domain is mentioned. Backtweets alerts you when your domain is mentioned in Twitter, even if your Web address has been shortened using a third-party URL shortener.

Setting up these alerts is imperative for managing your brand online and taking opportunities to connect with new networks of audiences. When you respond publicly to a tweet about your blog or company, you are also responding to the audience of that Twitter member. Provide a path to your blog, your contact form, or a landing page to bring the conversation home.

Monitoring shortened links more effectively with bit.ly

Of the URL shorteners on the market bit.ly (<http://bit.ly>) is unique because it tracks clicks. bit.ly also has extensive integration into other third-party tools and an application programming interface for integrating it into your own tools.

bit.ly gets unique user-level data and aggregated link data, which allows you to see real-time data on how your link is distributed and linked to across the Web. (See Figure 15-7.)

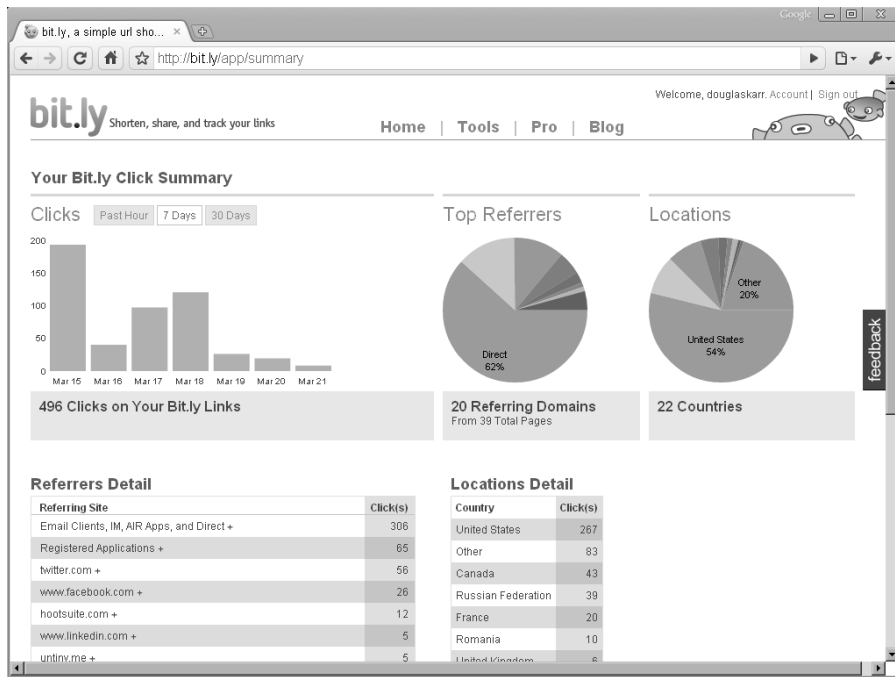


Figure 15-7:
Viewing reporting data in bit.ly for shortened Web addresses.

Measuring Your Feed's Consumption and Number of RSS Subscribers

Monitoring how many people are visiting your blog's feed is not possible by default in modern blogging platforms nor is it a feature in analytics applications.

Measuring consumption of your feed isn't an easy task. Feed analytics applications must try to estimate the number of times the feed was requested by each source and your reach on a daily basis. Not only feed readers request your feed. If you've syndicated your feed throughout social networks and other social applications, each of those requests adds up, too.

There are also several different standards of feeds, including Atom, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) 1.0, and Really Simple Syndication (RSS) 2.0. In the past, these multiple standards offered quite a challenge for developers to keep track of. However, Google's FeedBurner allows you to monitor your feed consumption and publishes your feed in multiple standards.

Setting up your blog and its feeds on FeedBurner

Ideally, you want to keep track of the number of daily subscriptions your feed gets as well as its *reach* — an estimate of the number of daily readers. One application has come forward to take on the challenge of measuring the number of subscriptions and the daily reach your feed has — Google FeedBurner (<http://feedburner.google.com>). (See Figure 15-8.)

FeedBurner approximates the number of requests for your feed and the reach of your feed in a 24-hour period. Total number of subscribers incorporates the total number of requests for your feed, including automated methodologies.

Observing your feed subscribers is an important metric and a number which you will look to grow over time with your blog. Your feed's subscribers are your most ardent supporters and hard-core readers. Many times, these are industry leaders with influence who echo and amplify your blog's message. Writing consistent, compelling blog posts on a daily basis allows your business to grow and provides you with a core network of dedicated readers.

You can take advantage of this community by targeting them. If you're on a WordPress blog, you can search for and install the PostPost plug-in, which allows you to customize your feed with distinct messaging for this group.

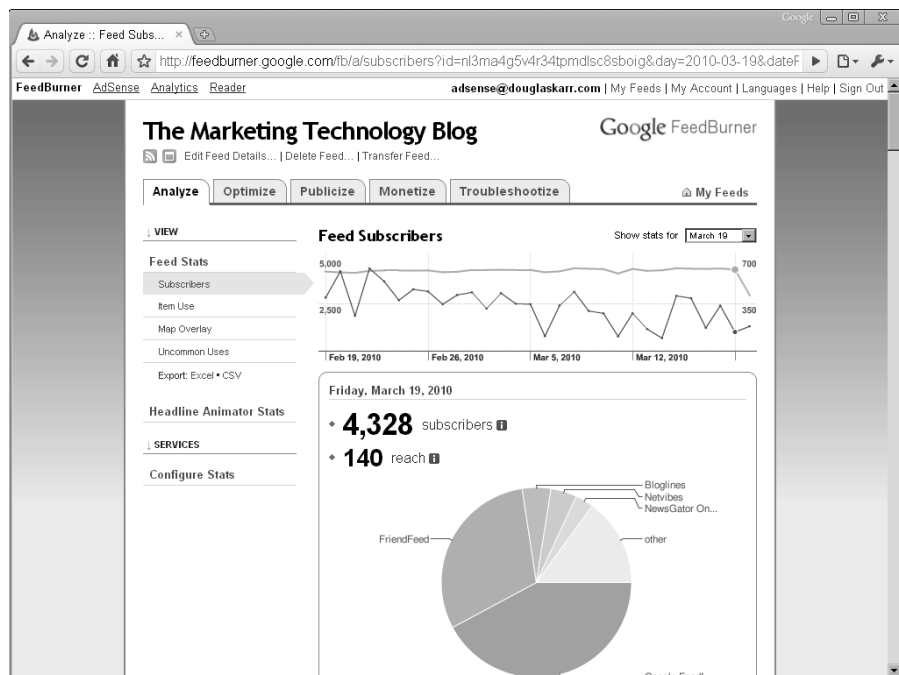


Figure 15-8:
Viewing
reporting
data in
Google
FeedBurner.

To add FeedBurner to your blog, follow these steps:

- 1. Sign up for an account on FeedBurner.**
- 2. Enter your blog's feed address in the Burn a Feed Right Now field.**

If you don't know your blog's feed address, try adding *feed* after your blog's Web address, like this:

```
http://blog.yourcompany.com/feed
```

If you're not aware of your blog's feed address, you can look for a link on your home page, view the hypertext markup language (HTML) source of your page, or contact your platform's support department.

- 3. Enter a title for your feed.**

A default title populates from your feed's information.

- 4. Enter a unique name for your feed.**

This will be the text immediately following the FeedBurner address that uniquely identifies your feed. Try to keep it short and easy to remember!

- 5. Click Next.**

FeedBurner provides you with your new feed address.

Modifying your blog's theme to integrate FeedBurner

You're not done after you *burn* your feed! You want to enter that feed address into the header file throughout your blog. Browsers automatically detect feed addresses through a specific chunk of code within the code of your page; it's not visible in the actual page. The code looks similar to the following:

```
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="RSS 2.0" href="http://marketingtechblog.com/feed" />
```

When you update the feed address with your FeedBurner address, applications that automatically detect your feed through your domain find the FeedBurner address and you'll capture the necessary feed analytics. Be sure to update all template references to your Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed with your new FeedBurner address.

You may have to wait a few hours to begin noticing changes. As well, FeedBurner doesn't always request a new copy of your feed immediately. To save on resources, FeedBurner stores a *cached* version (copy) of your feed. As a result, you may not see blog posts you've recently published display immediately in your blog's feed.