

Web analytics: Your Portal to Insight

By Gary Angel

Everybody knows that the Web is a major customer touchpoint. Web analytics – the study of visitor behavior online – is the primary vehicle for the intelligent optimization of that touch-point. But Web analytics can be useful to marketers even when their responsibilities aren't tied to the Web.

The online channel's measurability makes it a unique testing ground and research platform for understanding your customers' concerns as well as the messaging they respond to.

Your Web sites can provide the world's largest focus group to evaluate mass media expenditures. When Web analytics are used properly, you can measure the behavioral impact of print versus radio or TV.

Your Web site tracks customers at every stage of the sales cycle – from early researchers to committed customers. You can measure how each group responds to messaging through Web analytics, by testing messaging and creative approaches and tracking trends in how each segment is evolving. The Web isn't a perfect sample and must be used carefully, but the common misperception that Web data is somehow inapplicable to the rest of the business is obsolete.

Online channel concepts may even reshape the measurement of traditional advertising. With the big debate over how to handle DVRs and the fundamental shift in the way most companies are thinking about their customer interactions, Web-based concepts of differential engagement and brand promoters are percolating into more traditional media buying channels.

The Web can serve as a primary collection point for customer feedback, an efficient vehicle for quantitative attitudinal research and a built-in tracking panel for attrition/retention analysis. Behavioral visitor segmentation, product development, brand tuning and tracking, and messaging research are all a part of Web analytics. So don't let the online guys have all the fun — many of the best uses for Web analytics don't involve improving the Web site at all.

THE TAKEAWAY

With Web analytics, your Web site can be used as an extremely large focus group