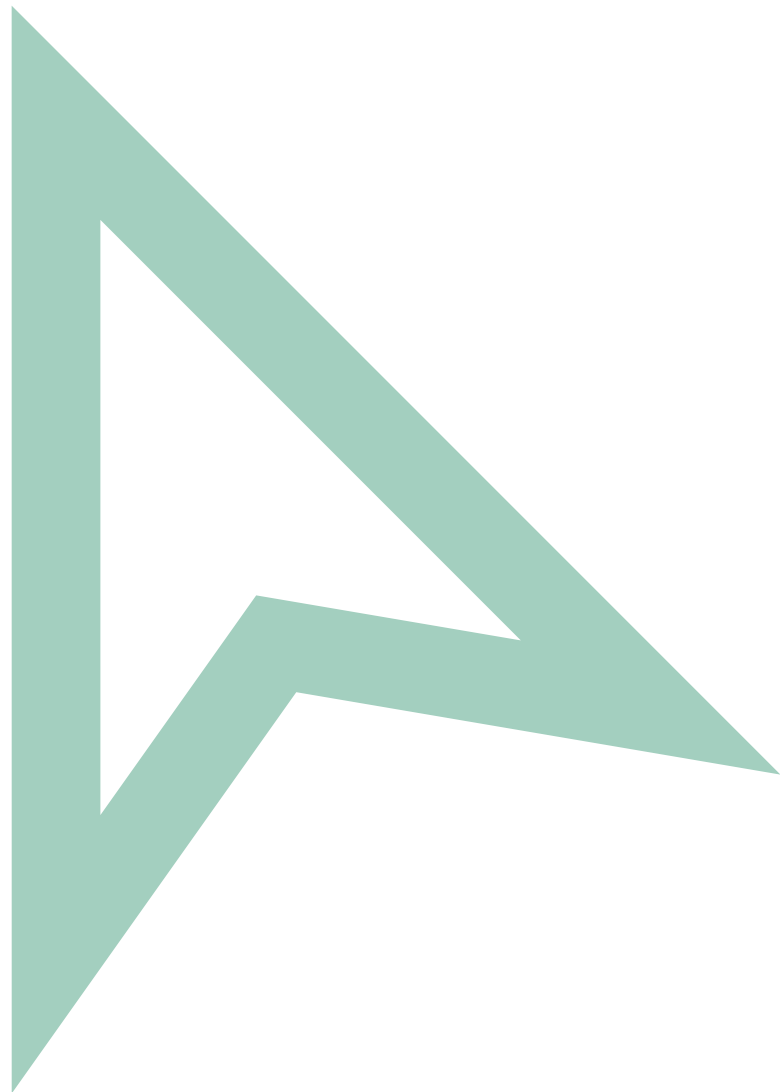


Keeping Track of Your Website Visitors



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Put Invisible Customers on Your Radar Screen

In today's industrial marketplace, your Website is no longer just a sales tool. It's a survival tool. As early as 2002, *B2B Magazine* reported that 90% of buyers and specifiers first turn to the Web when sourcing companies, products, and services.¹

In this environment, where buyers and specifiers enjoy access to a virtual smorgasbord of suppliers and product information, your customers and prospects are increasingly becoming invisible to you.

They're on the Internet, comparing you to your competitors and moving anonymously through the buying process. Whether or not a prospect chooses to buy from you is entirely up to your Website – its content, its ease of use, and its capacity to help visitors find exactly what they need.

Where does that leave you? Completely in the dark...unless you can find out how customers and prospects are getting to your Website, and follow their footsteps through your site.

Get Back on Track with Your Customers

Cutting-edge Website tracking technologies make it possible to indirectly connect you with the people who visit your Website, so you can determine whether your Website is effectively converting these visitors into customers.

With the right Web tracking solution, you can obtain rich data on how many visitors come to your site, where they come from, the duration of their visits, your most popular pages or products, and other details that will help you craft a better site.

Even more important, you can discover which of your pages have high abandon rates and how many users hit the Back Button the instant they land at your home page. This is vital information in today's Internet-centric business climate.

¹*B2B Magazine, June 2002*

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Herein lies the true benefit of a Website tracking solution. Using the valuable data it provides, you can zero in on the areas of your Website that need improvement, initiate upgrades that will enhance the user experience and, in the end, convert more visitors into customers.

Website tracking data also helps you correlate your marketing activities with the behavior of your online buyers. By analyzing data that reveals where your visitors are coming from and what they're doing when they arrive at your site, you can better determine which of your Internet marketing initiatives are driving the most qualified traffic to your Website.

But you need to tread carefully, because the Website tracking landscape is a minefield of hit-and-miss products and approaches.

With the right Website tracking software, it's possible to gather detailed information about the people who visit your Website. Specifically:

- **Referral sites** – How many users come to your site by clicking on search engine or directory listings, links from other sites, and so on.
- **Page views** – Which specific pages these visitors are looking at, and how many times they look.
- **User sessions** – What they do while they're on your site. How deep down they dig. How long they spend on each page. What they download and what they buy.

With the wrong Website tracking software, on the other hand, you're apt to spend a lot of money obtaining data that offers little value and even less significance. To make sure you get the right software, it's important you understand the fundamental differences between server-side tracking and client-side tracking.

The Difference Between Server-Side and Client-Side Tracking

- ▶ **Server-side** tracking software draws inferences about Website activity based on the server's activity.
- ▶ **Client-side** tracking software analyzes Web users' activity directly on a particular Website – a significant distinction, as you will see.

First, though, it's helpful to become familiar with the terminology of tracking. Whenever a Web user visits a site, two noteworthy items of hardware come into play. A “**server**”, which stores, or “hosts”, the many files that make up the Website. A “**client**” which, in this context, is a desktop or laptop computer running a Web browser.

When the user enters the site's URL into the Web browser or clicks a link within the site, the client sends a request to the site's server, which “serves” the files for the requested Web page to the user's browser. Every time the Web server receives a request for a file, it records, or “logs,” a hit.

Server-side tracking tools create records, called “log files,” of hits on a server and attempts to reverse-engineer this superficial data into something meaningful. But the results can be unreliable, as server-side tracking simply can't measure real user behavior.

No doubt you're familiar with the term “hits.” Hits look fantastic on paper, but as far as statistical significance goes, their value is limited. Remember: a server logs a hit every time it serves up a file; but any single page of a Website comprises multiple files (including graphics files) – anywhere from half a dozen to over 100. Contrary to the prevalent misconception, “one hit” doesn't equal “one visitor.” This means that if you're counting your Website hits as visitors, you could be significantly over-counting the number of visitors your Website is getting. And while this may boost company morale, it won't do much to help your business grow.

To compound the shortfalls inherent in server-side tracking reports, computer technology throws cache files and proxy servers into the mix.

When a user visits a page on your Website, the page files are stored in a “cache folder” on the user's hard drive. If the user later returns to that page, the browser – to save time – will fetch the cached files instead of making a much longer trip to the Web server. This can result in under-counting your Website traffic.

Even if your server-side tracking software is monitoring page views and user sessions, it may be under-counting that data because server-side tracking software has no way to tell when a visitor views cached pages of your Website.

Keeping Track of Your Website Visitors

Another reason server-side tracking software under-counts Website traffic is something called a proxy server – a machine that stores various Websites in order to heighten the efficiency of the Internet. As an example: to accelerate page downloads for its customers, AOL downloads Websites like yours to proxy servers, of which it has hundreds scattered across the country. When AOL users connect to the Internet and pull up your site, they're actually accessing it from an AOL proxy server.

Yet server-side tracking software accounts for only the initial download of your site to the proxy server. After that, anyone who accesses your site via a proxy server remains beneath the tracking software's radar, and the under-counting effect becomes amplified.

Get the Complete Picture of Your Website Activity

If you want to know what's happening on your Website, client-side tracking provides a level of control to your efforts by keeping tabs on your otherwise invisible customers.

With client-side tracking, a few lines of JavaScript code are added to each page of your Website. When new users come to your site, this code is downloaded to their computers. By "tagging" your visitors in this way, client-side tracking solutions monitor the user's paths through your Website. You'll learn where they came from, what they did during their sessions on your site, and when they left.

When you analyze this Website traffic data, you'll be able to determine what on your site is working and what isn't, so you can fix the bad and improve upon the good. For example:

- You can identify and fix the pages that have high abandon rates.
- You can learn that a lot of people are abandoning your registration form at a particular step, and adjust the form accordingly.
- You can add more CAD drawings if you discover a strong correlation between people downloading your drawings and buying your products.

The true beauty of client-side tracking is its capacity to measure real customer behavior. You'll be getting good data, and good data is what's behind all good business decisions.

Get True Marketing Intelligence with Web Traxs®

A client-side Website tracking solution, such as Web Traxs, can give you a comprehensive view of how users interact with your Website. Being able to analyze your Website traffic is critical to growing your business online.

With Web Traxs, you can:

- ▶ **Evaluate How Well Your Website Converts Traffic to Customers**
Discover what items users are downloading, the pages they visit most, and the pages with the highest abandon rate. Identify which parts of your site need to be improved to convert more traffic into customers.
- ▶ **Find Out How Users Get to Your Website...and What They Do When They Get There**
Real-time activity reports display where your users are coming from – whether it's from a search engine or ThomasNet's network of industrial search sites. Track the path users take within your site, which page they enter on, which pages they visit, and how long they stay.
- ▶ **Know What Keywords are Driving Traffic to Your Website**
Find out which search terms are getting you the most qualified traffic by viewing the top 150 keywords and phrases that users search to get to your Website.
- ▶ **Implement a Web Tracking Solution Quickly and Easily**
Start tracking your Website in just a few days. A few lines of JavaScript code can easily be added to each page of your Website by your Web developer, or with our assistance.

Web Traxs, a client-side Web tracking solution from ThomasNet.com, powered by Thomas Register and Thomas Regional, helps ensure that your company is making the most out of its Internet marketing resources. Armed with the detailed information Web Traxs provides, you'll be able to gauge the effectiveness of your Internet marketing initiatives.

Web Traxs is just one component of ThomasNet's complete suite of solutions for helping industrial suppliers grow their businesses online.

For more information about keeping track of your Website visitors, contact your local ThomasNet.com representative or call 1-800-TR-WORKS

