



THE GROWING INTELLIGENCE OF WEB ANALYTICS

Abstract

Web analytics has been on a path of constant transformation since the early days of the Internet. This paper traces the journey of its growing intelligence along the way and presents how this will have continued and increased relevance for business in a world rapidly going digital.

The evolution of web analytics

Most businesses today have an established online presence and thus understand — to a certain extent — web analytics and its importance. However, this acceptance has come slowly over time only after the massive evolution that web analytics technology has undergone since its inception.

With the birth of the world wide web in 1990, the web analytics journey began

with server log files which maintained a list of all the hits to the server. Then, 1993-1996 saw providers like Webtrends and Analog coming into existence helping to analyze the otherwise difficult to understand log files. Later, even as the Internet underwent a wave of changes from 1996 onwards, counting visitors to websites became a primary criterion of online businesses with Web-Counter along with Omniture catering to this need.¹

In the second wave of 2005, as the internet evolved ever quicker, Google Analytics entered the space of tracking websites and the period saw a change in the old hit counting methods to JavaScript tags. This set the stage for what we see today as web analytics with providers such as Google, Adobe (Omniture), Clicktale, and Amplitude, among many others.¹

A change in paradigm

Throughout the web analytics journey, most organizations have not leveraged the technology to its fullest potential, rather looking at it only as a medium to provide website metrics, such as visits, visitors, and page views. With no linkage to key business objectives or metrics they thereby

lost sight of tracking ROI.

However, today there is a definite drift seen from this mindset as an increasing number of businesses move from traditional channels to digital and as those who have been in this space longer increase their digital marketing spends. This is

now forcing organizations to not just use web analytics to report numbers but as a medium for advanced analytics and transform into a complete Live Enterprise environment where data, machines, and humans are connected for an active synchronous and asynchronous ecosystem.

A more comprehensive tool

Some recent studies indicate that the ~\$3 Billion web analytics market of today is expected to grow to ~\$10 billion by 2026². Web analytics today has mostly moved from siloes of metrics, tech, and analysis to a more robust system encompassing all of these while also providing business with abundant data and insights. Some current trends seen today underscore the change in the digital landscape and the continuing relevance of web analytics.

For instance, recently several stringent regulations have come into force across the world — such as GDPR, CCPA, COPPA — to protect the data and privacy of internet

users. This has ensured that businesses and MarTechs take their data seriously and make their activities compliant with these laws. Thus, there is now a continuing, massive change in the way data is captured with more transparency provided to customers and users on how their information is used, and this will require using web analytics in a more circumspect manner.

Moreover, while early web analytics tools were confined to websites alone, the advent of the mobile web has required a scaling up of the technology. Today the magnitude of mobile apps that are being

developed and adopted — with most of them providing native services — has warranted unified tracking and analytics for apps as well. Thus, with consumer patterns shifting from single-channel to platform-agnostic browsing, and some tech giants such as Google recently releasing their app+web properties, web analytics providers are making cross-platform analytics a primary strategy. This answers the need of businesses to have a universal view of the performance of their products, service offerings, and digital assets on different platforms.

What the future holds

Web analytics can be defined as the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of traffic data for the purposes of understanding and optimizing the digital experience. The coming days will see a lot of changes in the web analytics space starting with how the data would be collected, the ways with which they are measured and analyzed, to the unique ways in which how all this information will be visualized. Let's look at a few things that the future holds in store for the space:

- **My data my setup:** Traditionally, the collection of data has been enabled through tag management systems, with cookies at the core. While these methods have scaled and improved greatly, we will start seeing organizations moving from service providers to setting up their own in-house infrastructure to collect and analyze clickstream data. A self-operated platform has multiple advantages, starting from integrating with multiple marketing tools, to obtaining real-time, actionable insights through predictive, customer, and other advanced analytics, to enabling greater data ownership, privacy, and protection.
- **Smarter analytics:** The exponential rise of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and analytics in all areas is likely to play out in web analytics as well. Certain trends today prove that smarter analytics is the way forward, and with the advent of hyper automation, it is now seamless. Google has their smart goals and smart lists along with smart quality, and Adobe Analytics has anomaly detection, and contribution analysis that uses machine learning. All these technologies would be taken to the next level in the coming years to help businesses obtain important, real-time insights that would be otherwise hard for analysts to identify from the vast and divergent set of data available today. Data-driven attribution modelling in one such area where futuristic solutions are expected to be a game changer.
- **Disappearing vanity metrics:** Vanity metrics are those that are more of a want and less of a need. Traditional web analytics tools and platforms provide businesses with truckloads of vanity metrics such as on visitors, registered users, and page views. This has now started to change with newer metrics focusing on the health of the business rather than on the health of the business' website. Registered users are good for businesses to know but knowing the active base better would help improve and optimize according to the business goals. Similarly, it is good to know the click-throughs, but more important to know the leakages. Multivariate and A/B test would play an important role in identifying what can be called business health metrics, leading to a fresh approach to customers, conversions, and campaigns.
- **"Do not track" and "cookie-less":** Not all will be hunky dory. While data privacy and protection are, and will continue to be, of utmost importance for business and web analytics providers, "do not track" will be a double-edged sword that provides browsers with the authority to decide if they can be tracked³. While the method of collecting web data has always been through using cookies, third- and first-party cookies and strict tracking rules are now being imposed by browsers, for e.g., Apple's Intelligent Tracking Prevention. Thus, tracking is just going to get even tougher with the advent of the "cookie-less" world.

A greater relevance moving forward

In an increasingly digital world, customer journeys, behavior, and expectations are expected to only grow ever more dynamic. Thus, in the near future, doing business will involve more connected technologies and stronger omnichannel presence. Research studies^{4,5}, suggest that by 2030 every organization will become a digital organization powered by what can be called the Triple A's - AI,

analytics, and automation. Within this context, web analytics too will evolve further rapidly into an effective form of digital intelligence, with the Triple A's at its core and hyper automation as fast as yesterday.

For the digital organization to become a reality, web analytics will undoubtedly need to be an integral part of the

strategy, and businesses and MarTechs will need to adapt to and adopt its digital intelligence to find simplistic, quick methods of solving increasingly complex business equations. Organizations that do this well will be the ones that meet their customers' expectations to stay ahead in the digital race.

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Vinay has a rich experience over 16 years in the Digital Analytics domain. Skilled in conceptualizing and designing new age digital analytics solution and delivering high-impact analytics solutions and programs for biggest brands in Airlines, CPG, Retail, telecom, Tourism & Hospitality, Healthcare, and E-Commerce industry across the globe. Vinay currently leads the Social and Web Analytics practice within the Digital Transformation Services team at Infosys, for delivering high end, data-driven solutions in Digital Analytics. Prior to Infosys, Vinay has worked with Target Corporation India and Dell.



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¹ <https://amplitude.com/blog/2015/06/15/the-early-days-of-web-analytics>

² <https://www.globenewswire.com/en/news-release/2020/07/02/2057046/0/en/Global-Web-Analytics-Market-to-Reach-10-73-Billion-by-2026-Allied-Market-Research.html>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_privacy_law

⁴ <https://www.news18.com/news/tech/digital-dell-india-1464227.html>

⁵ <https://corporate.delltechnologies.com/en-in/newsroom/realizing-2030-dell-technologies-research-explores-the-next-era-of-human-machine-partnerships.htm>

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