

B2B Blog Metrics: 4 Effective Categories to Measure Success

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Businesses that engage corporate blogging with professionalism and process can boost visibility, grow a community, and ultimately, have a meaningful influence on sales.

For example, I once worked for a company that found visitors that engaged the blog were 50% more likely to make a purchase. At another company, the blog was a touch point on a sales cycle for roughly one-third of enterprise deals with an average selling price in excess of seven digits.

The first measure came from a business with a marketing automation system implemented. The second measure was largely a manual effort: going back through the deals closed at the end of the year and identifying which ones had downloaded gated content featured on the blog.

When comparing these two examples, it's easy to think a significant amount of attribution went unmeasured in the latter. I'm convinced marketing automation would have been enlightening.

Directional Indications of Success

Neither one of those companies saw sales solely because of a blog. Instead, the revenue was the result of a combination of efforts across sales, marketing and other departmental

functions that included a blog.

More importantly, the sales were not immediate. There are few tactics in B2B marketing that lead to such direct effects. No prospect whips out a credit card to make an enterprise software purchase because of an individual blog post, or a webinar, or a phone call, or any other effort. Instead, both companies first experienced an indication of success: traffic.

Traffic is a directional indication of performance. For all the flaws we can find with traffic, when used in conjunction with additional measures, it can guide our thinking as to whether or not a program or initiative is headed in the right direction.

Components to Effectively Measure a B2B Blog

There are a lot of different metrics that can indicate performance, but that's also one of the pitfalls. This is because trying to track too many metrics creates a bloated spreadsheet or dashboard with a lot of data nobody really looks at.

To keep things simple, I tend to categorize metrics into broad buckets: visibility, community strength, quality and marketing or business impact. All of these can be measured with freely available tools, as opposed to the army of developers (and budget) it often takes to implement marketing automation.

While there are some measures I like better than others, I will customize, swap or recategorize metrics based on the needs or capabilities of a client.

1) Measures of Visibility

Can people find your content? How well does your content move? Measures of visibility I've come to rely on include:

- **Visitors.** The total number of people that visit a blog, including repeat visitors. Google Analytics (GA) today

refers to this as “sessions.”

- **Unique visitors.** A subset of “visitors” measure that filters out repeat visitors. Do you need both? I like to monitor both because I have a theory about a growing number of people are “read-you-later” visitors that scan during the day and read carefully at night. This is especially true with long form content. GA refers to “unique visitors” as “users.”
- **Backlinks.** A backlink is created when one site links to another. A backlink can send referral traffic and improve organic search traffic. It is this measure that SEO and PR pros should collaborate for the greatest impact. The search experts at Moz say it takes about 10 weeks for backlinks to impact organic search; I like the Open Site Explorer by Moz as means to track this metric.

Social shares are sometimes a metric I’ll include in the visibility category, depending on the client. Sure, the volume of shares is interesting, but it’s also who is sharing that counts. Weaving relevant shares is an effective way to illustrate the value of a corporate blog and weave qualitative measures into quantitative reporting.

Professional tip: Want to capitalize on visibly sooner? Cookie the blog and then use it for retargeting (those ads that follow you around the web after visiting a site). This is a good example of integrated marketing.

2) Community Strength

Building a strong online community ought to be a core objective for a corporate blog. A business that spends any amount of advertising money should be able to see the value. Advertising is in effect paying to reach someone else’s community, so why not invest and build your own in the long run?

Three measures of community strength I gravitate towards

include:

- **Returning visitors.** Most websites will find the vast majority of visitors to a website are new. While it's always good to meet new people, the foundation of a community is returning visitors. I prefer numerical measure for this metric rather than a percentage of overall visitors. This is because as a blog grows in traffic, the percentage may cloak the growth in repeat visitors.
- **RSS subscriptions.** Social media has tempered RSS but it is still an important way to make content available. It provides people with a chance to join a community through a subscription without having to give up an email address. Yet it's still a strong indication of community strength because someone is actively telling you they want your content. Services to provide an RSS feed include Feedblitz and Feedburner (by Google). I use Feedburner for this site you can see an example at the top right of this page.

Email subscriptions. A willingness to provide an email address is a solid measure of community. Some of the RSS tools like Feedburner enable you to provide an email-based subscription but don't overlook capturing emails for the traditional newsletter either. Email is the original owned media platform and still the first and only killer app.

Too many corporate blogs skip the subscription mechanisms, which a little bit like forgoing the benefits of compound interest in a bank savings account. More importantly, if your blog is built on WordPress – and three-quarters of all blogs are – this very easy to remedy in under an hour.

3) Quality

Quality is enormously challenging to quantify. As the saying goes, one person's trash is another's treasure. However, it's

still important to put some metrics around quality and monitor it over time. Two metrics I like to this end include:

- ***Time-on-page.*** This measures how long visitors spend with on your blog. You will find – much like interest rates and the yield on a bond – an inverse correlation between visitors and time on page. Track this metric monthly, but monitor results over the long run. Look for trends in the topics and types of content that keep people engaged. The more time people spend with your content, the better the chances they'll turn into a customer. GA refers to this as “average session duration.”
- ***Organic search.*** Chances organic search is the leading source of traffic to your website. With trillions of searches a year, it also represents the biggest opportunity for growth. However, search engines want to return the best results in response to search queries, which is why I find this a useful measure of quality. Sometimes I'll include backlinks in this category – as a measure of quality. Quality is in effect why links have a profound influence on search. If a business seems especially search savvy – usually the more metric driven organizations – I'll sometimes break out another category called “search value” for measuring performance indicators.

4) Marketing impact

Naturally, we want to have measures that show a more direct impact on marketing and the business. Yet sometimes the ability to measure requires access to talent or systems in your sphere of influence. Here's how to make the case, while demonstrating the contribution in the process:

- ***Conversions.*** If your organization gates content – white papers, webinars and or demos – track the source of registrations. A spreadsheet makes this possible; a system makes it easier.

- **Referrals out.** When using web analytics, be sure to look for data the blog sends elsewhere. In other words, look to identify where the blog sends traffic. If you are able to demonstrate how a blog has become a top source of referral traffic for product page – this opens minds to the virtues of B2B blogging.
- **Anecdotes.** Document any anecdotes you hear in the course of doing business – a customer that compliments a blog at a trade show, a comment noted in an NPS survey, or an enablement story from sales. If you're disciplined about recording these, a few seemingly disparate anecdotes will over time, turn into a spreadsheet of evidence.

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While these metrics have proven effective for me, the list is suggestive rather than prescriptive. For some, this list of metrics will seem overwhelming, while for others, it'll feel incomplete. You've to find what works for you and your organization – and then continuously improve it over time. If you can do that, you'll wind up with sales as the measure of success.

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This piece originally appeared on the Sword and the Script blog.