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**How to Read Web Stats**

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# How to Read Web Stats

Analyzing traffic statistics is an important part of maintaining a business website or blog, but they can be confusing, especially when you aren't sure what the numbers mean. Here is an abridged explanation on how to measure stats effectively:

## Hits

Hits are incredibly misleading because they do not equal people. A hit is tracked for every file loaded each time your page is loaded. This means that each photo is tracked as a hit, so if you have a blog heavy with pictures, each time a reader loads that page, you are getting a substantial amount of hits.

For example, if you blogged about a recent wedding and have 10 photos up from it, then that post counts as 11 or more hits each time it is viewed by one person. So if you had 100 visitors in one day and 10 pictures on your first page, that would be over 1,000 hits just because of the photos alone. A lot of people like to measure hits because the numbers are inflated and it makes them feel as though they are receiving a lot of traffic and are

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popular. While the ego boost may feel nice for a while, it is based on numbers that don't actually mean too much and that do not measure how effective your blog or site actually is.

### Page Views

Page views vary per visitor because they are tracked each time a new page is loaded. Knowing page views is useful because it can help you determine how long people are staying on your site once they arrive. Did they find your blog and leave immediately or did they stick around and dig through your archives? If you are tracking your website, it is important to know if the information you are presenting hooked them in to learn more about you and your company, or if they got bored and went on to the next planner's site on their list.

When analyzing page view numbers, it is important not to give them more weight than they're worth. If your aunt is reading through everything you ever wrote, then those numbers don't really count for much because she is probably not a potential

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client. Same goes for a competitor searching through all of your archives or site pages to see what you've been up to.

### **Unique Visitors**

Unique visitors are important because they represent individual people accessing your site within certain time frames. This number can sometimes be skewed by people resetting cookies or visiting via a site that masks their IP address, but it is generally the most accurate measure of real traffic to your site. Your unique visitor number will usually be lower than your daily visitor number or monthly visitor numbers because it doesn't count someone if they visit your site three or four times in one day or every day in a month, whereas the other two count every visit, unique or not.

### **Return Visitors**

Return visitors are another number to monitor because they show how many people are coming back, which shows how large your consistent audience actually is. For blogs, this is an

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extremely important statistic to measure because it means people want to know what you have to say on a regular basis. If your returning visitor stats are low it is a sign that you need to work on being more interesting or that you are not delivering information that is pertinent to your audience or that you are not attracting your target market or readership.

### **Subscribers**

Blog subscribers are important because it means they have signed up to receive updates, either via an RSS reader or email each time you update your blog. The number of subscribers you have is usually lower than your real reader numbers. Just like magazines, some people will subscribe and others will pick up a copy on the newsstand when it's released every month. It is important to track subscribers though because those numbers represent people who are committed to keeping up with what you have to say and not just tuning in when it seems interesting to them. At the same time, it is also necessary to remember that

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many subscribers may be other vendors or planners and not brides.

So why is it so important to measure your web traffic? There are a lot of reasons, but here are a few that pertain specifically to wedding planners:

1) Knowing how effective your site or blog is in reality versus how popular you think it is. Why would you spend so much money and/or time on a marketing tool without really knowing whether the ROI is worth it? If people are not sticking around on your website to learn more about what you have to offer, then you are most likely losing sales that you don't even know about.

2) If you are considering hosting advertising or purchasing advertising space on another site or blog, then it is important to know your real numbers. Being able to prove stats will help you set competitive ad rates and give you leverage in attracting advertisers. If you are considering advertising on another site or

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blog, it is important to know whether or not your ad will be in front of a lot of eyeballs. If it's not included in their media kit, ask to see screen shots of numbers and graphs from their analytics in order to get an idea of the site's real traffic patterns before handing over your marketing dollars. Nothing on the Internet is really anonymous anymore, and if they won't provide you with those numbers (which would be a red flag anyway), then there are other sites where you can look up that information for yourself.

3) Knowing the real numbers behind your stats shows how sticky you are (it is called the world wide web after all) and whether or not your efforts are attracting the right people. For example, if you are featured in the e-version of your local paper or a national magazine, it will most likely generate traffic to your site. Knowing how to measure your analytics will show you how many of those visitors are actually in your target market. Did they stick around past the initial introduction or are they a fleeting acquaintance?

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There are lots of statistics tracking services on the market, but four that work well are Google Analytics, Feedburner, Statcounter and Sitemeter. All of these have versions that are free to use. Google Analytics was formerly Urchin Analytics and used to run about \$300 a month. Google acquired it and made it free of charge, but didn't downgrade any of its power. It is considered one of the best on the market for small business owners to use.