

INSIDE: Your Google AdWords™ gift card worth \$50!

BRIAN CLIFTON

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Advanced Web Metrics with Google Analytics™

THIRD EDITION



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The latter two categories I classify as publishers, and they usually employ both methods of generating revenue. As a publisher, if you provide advertising-based content, then you have a dilemma: If you write the perfect article to fit on one page, visitors will read that single page, be satisfied, and move on to another site or activity. They will be single-page visitors. However, single-page visits are not good for business when you derive your revenue from advertising. To increase your revenue, you want visitors to read more pages so that they are exposed to more advertisements (greater inventory), increasing the likelihood that they will click one. That makes your website more attractive to advertisers.

Regardless of your content site's business model, greater engagement with your visitors is the key. Consequently, content managers are always looking at ways to include complementary subject matter with each article or page to encourage this. Clearly for content sites, visit volume—the number of visits per day, week, or month—is an important KPI, along with how this varies over time. However, the following sample KPIs focus on helping you measure engagement:

- Bounce rate
- Percent engagement
- Average time on site and pageviews per visit
- Advertisement performance
- Percent new versus returning visitors
- Percent high, medium, low visitor recency

Bounce Rate

A *bounce* in Google Analytics terminology is a one-page, zero-action visit—that is, a visitor arrives on your website, views one page, has no further action, and then bounces off to another site or closes their browser. It's an important, very-easy-to-understand KPI that every stakeholder wishes to reduce. Bounced visitors have no value to your business (assuming you have a well-crafted article that entices further click-throughs) and are important to minimize because an e-commerce manager wishes to maximize revenue. Web analysts love analyzing bounce rates—such a simple metric that can be so telling for web performance.

The bounce-rate calculation can vary for different web analytics vendors, so I clarify the formula here for Google Analytics:

$$\text{percentage bounce rate}_{\text{page X}} = \frac{\text{number of single page visits with zero actions}_{\text{page X}}}{\text{number of entry page visits}_{\text{page X}}}$$

I emphasize the use of the term *zero actions*. By *action*, I mean any non-pageview action that can be tracked by Google Analytics—such as an event (file download, Flash movie interaction, and so on) or e-commerce transaction. See Chapter 7 for further details on e-commerce and event tracking.

Note: Labeling a visitor, as described in Chapter 9, is not defined as an action in this context.



The average website bounce rate (a weighted average of all your page bounce rates) is quoted in numerous places throughout Google Analytics reports (for example, in the Content Overview report). To view the bounce rate for a particular page, view the Content > Site Content > Pages report, shown in Figure 10.14. Because bounce rates can vary quite widely from page to page, I maintain focus by using an advanced filter in Figure 10.14 to exclude outliers (very high or very low bounce rates and pages with low pageview traffic). The filter is shown in Figure 10.15.

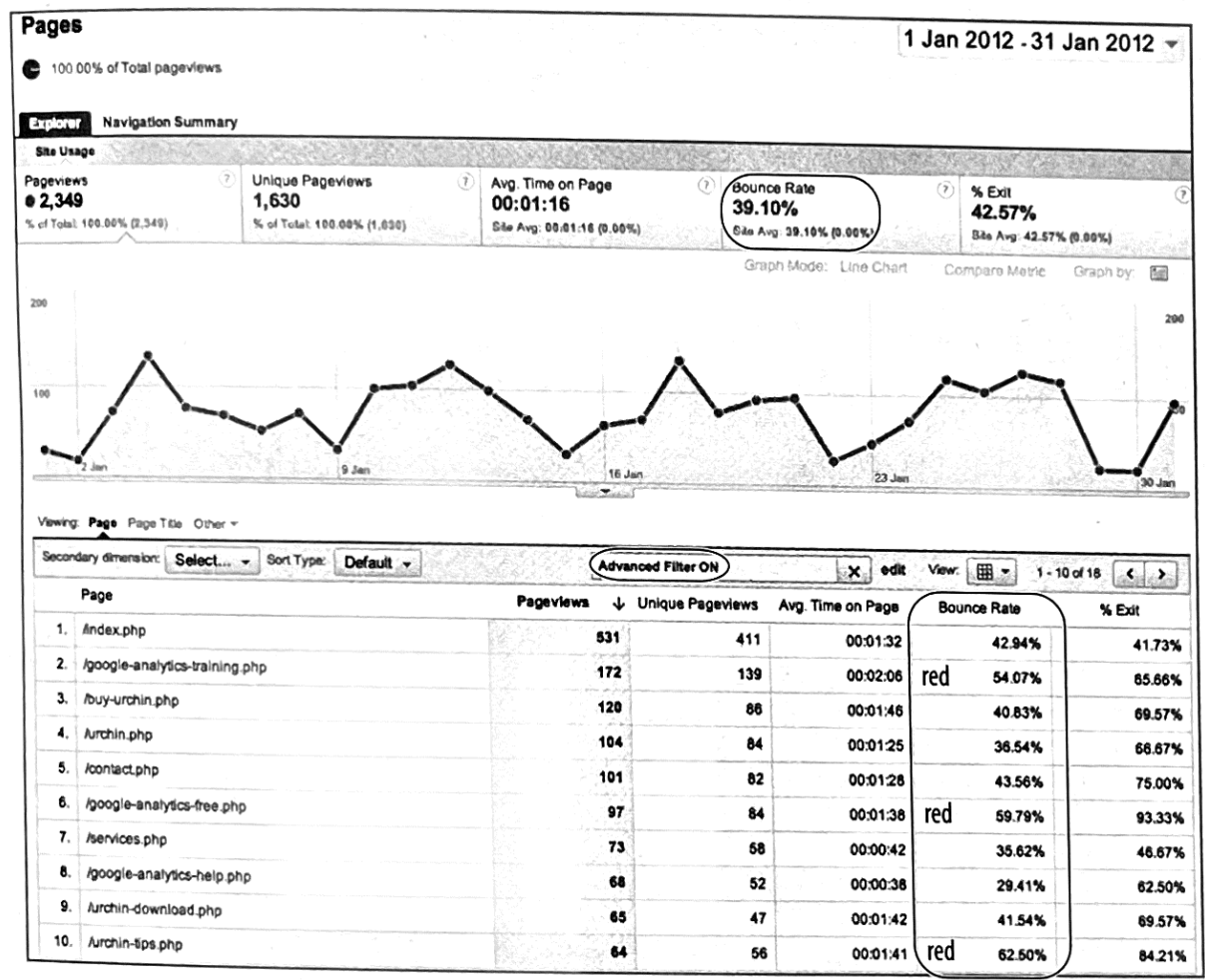


Figure 10.14 Top Content report using an advanced filter to focus on bounce rates

Average Time on Site and Pageviews per Visit

The average time on site is the length of time visitors spend interacting with your website, and it is a good base metric to help you understand whether your visitors are engaging with your site. All content creators want to increase this KPI—assuming, of course, the visitor experience is a good one.

The calculation is straightforward, though it is worth mentioning how it is determined. To calculate the time on site, Google Analytics uses the difference in time between the last and first pageview a visitor requests (or event if you are also tracking these). Note that times are measured when the page or event is *requested*, not when a visitor leaves a page. That complicates matters when the page in question is the last one visited—you know when the visitor made the request but not when they left. Perhaps the visitor opened another site in a new browser window or new browser tab or just minimized their browser while continuing with other work. These are very common scenarios resulting in the tracking session being closed by a cookie time-out, which is set at 30 minutes by default in Google Analytics, though it can be adjusted; see “Customizing the GATC” in Chapter 7. Having a final pageview last 30 minutes would clearly skew the time-on-site metrics. To avoid the situation, Google Analytics ignores the last pageview for all time-on-site calculations. In fact, this is a common approach throughout the web analytics industry.

The depth of visit—that is, the average pages per visit—is closely related to the time on site. If one increases, you would expect the other to also increase. Hence, they are displayed together in your Google Analytics reports. For example, if your depth of visit KPI causes you to ask further questions, you should also refer to the time on site. It could be that a low average pages per visit KPI is a bad thing. However, if these visitors also display a high time on site or trigger other on-page events such as watching a Flash movie clip, then it could be good thing.

As with all KPIs, don’t use the site-wide average because that is too broad to be useful. A more informative view is to compare how these vary by visitor segment. For example, compare average time on site and pages per visit for new versus returning visitors or by referring traffic sources. To illustrate this, Figure 10.18 shows how these vary by referring source medium (taken from the Traffic Sources > Sources > All Traffic report). An interesting observation is that visitors from a print ad campaign have a very low pages per visit and low time on site, whereas visitors from social network sites have much higher rates. Initial thought—drop the print ad and invest the money saved into social media activities; marketing is changing!

By comparing segments for these KPIs, you can better tailor your website content, advertising, and overall usability for each visitor type. If you believe your content is already well structured and intuitive to use (everyone initially thinks that about their website), yet the average time on site or page depth is low, then consider how you are acquiring your visitors. Examine whether they are qualified visitors and whether the landing page they first arrive at is suitable for them.