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Audience 2.0: Time

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After analyzing the impact of web 2.0 *on the notion of unique visitor*, I continue my tour of web 2.0 audience measurement indicators.

Time spent has become the scarce resource on the internet. Everyone is looking to win the biggest piece of the pie: the user's time. He earns this time on other media (television in particular). But the war between sites is raging to monopolize the attention of Internet users as much as possible.

What's changing with Web 2.0 is that time is becoming so central that we can no longer be satisfied with the old way of measuring it. Until now, there have been two methods: panels and tools installed in the sites.

In the panels (this was our old job), we installed software on the computers of volunteer Internet users. Software means limitless possibilities. We were therefore able to refine the measurement of time by taking into account:

- Is the page (we were still talking about a page) visible?
- Is the panelist using their computer?

This allowed us to give a rather simple and complete definition of the time spent on a page: the period during which the page is visible AND the user of the computer is active.

In those remote times (I'm talking about a century ago, in 2005), the tools installed on the sites calculated time in a more crude way. The display time of a page was obtained by measuring the difference in the display time of the page and the time of the next page.

Whether the user immediately went back (to another site), was absent for a few minutes to satisfy an urgent need, or switched to Excel to do his accounts, none of this was taken into account. There were many a posteriori methods to limit the display time of a page (less than 30 minutes, or according to the average and standard deviation of the display of the same page by other Internet users). But it never went very far. This measure was always overestimated, and even worse, we were not even able to know how much it was overestimated.

When we (Nicolas and I) switched from panels to tools installed on sites, it would have hurt our butts too much to regress, and to do less well than what we were doing before.

However, with Web 2.0, Web 2.0 tools have appeared. And technological evolution has allowed us to carry the same definition, that of panels, into our on-site tool.

The only difference is that we're talking about content, not pages (I'll write a post about content, but be aware that, in most cases, content corresponds to the page in which it is displayed).

So: **"The time spent on content is the period during which the content is visible AND the user of the computer is active".**

As soon as we have a reliable definition of the notion of time, and the tools allow us to measure it exactly the time spent, time can become the central indicator of Web 2.0.

Why wasn't it until now? Because ads were bought by the page view, which on-site tools know how to measure, while they always overestimate the time spent.

Time will have really won, the *day the advertising will be bought over time*.

In a future episode, a demo will prove that it's possible...

Laurent Nicolas
04 Oct, 2007 17:32

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