How to Approach and Ensure Data Quality

“Hey, this report isn’t right. I know my campaign drove more traffic.”

Have you heard a concern like this from a member of your marketing team before?

Perhaps they are convinced a certain page got more views than reported. These kinds of conversations aren’t unusual and they usually come down to one thing: trust.

*Do you trust your data? Do the users on your team?*

If you have the right approach to data quality, the answer will be yes.

The Myth of Perfect Data

Many organizations and individuals insist they need to have 100 percent accurate data. It’s a pipe dream. There’s click fraud. Browser crashes. Bots. Broken tags from the latest page edits. There are a whole host of reasons why digital data isn’t 100 percent accurate.

But you can ensure the highest level of data accuracy by following a few important ground rules. First, use an analytics solution that does NOT sample data (Webtrends doesn’t). Pre- and post-production testing, tag auditing and a robust monitoring process are all important, too. But these items are only part of a solid, mature and executable data quality strategy. Organizations must first determine (and agree on) relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) and collect and analyze the related data consistently.

Everything or Just the Right Things

There are often two approaches to digital data collection. One way is to collect everything and figure out what to do with it later. The other approach is to plan data collection strategically, and align your data analytics with business needs and marketing objectives.
The first approach seems reasonable on the surface. You don’t know what you’ll need to know or measure later, so why not collect everything you can? The problem is this approach rarely works out. Too much data, and not the right data, can be the result.

Plan Ahead for Quality
Planning is a critical step for any project. For analytics, it is important to strategize on data accuracy.

A simple example would be agreeing on what is valid traffic. Is internal traffic relevant or something to exclude? What about bots and spiders? Perhaps your organization uses testing services like Gomez or Keynote that will hit your site. IT may want to track that to understand the loads on servers—but it’s likely marketing won’t want that in a report. If you only do business in one country, do you care about traffic from others?

We’ve seen many companies that haven’t established specific definitions for ‘real traffic.’ There might be a small amount of traffic from a bot, but someone notices the change and gets concerned. If numbers are suddenly different, ask why, but keep an eye on significance. If you usually have three million visits in a day, but your numbers change by 300, that isn’t significant.

Manage for Consistency
Once you’ve established what’s important to your organization, it’s important to continually monitor topline metrics. We recommend clients put a process in place for testing data, auditing tags and data collection – and review those processes regularly.

Daily is best for ongoing monitoring for many organizations. That way you can address the issue right away. If there is an issue with data collection, you don’t want to discover it weeks or months later.

Business plans change regularly and marketing teams launch new campaigns. On a monthly, quarterly and annual basis it is wise to establish more formal reviews of reporting to ensure the appropriate metrics are being tracked for your business needs.

Tips and Tools
Everyone needs an ongoing auditing process because things will break from time to time. You can manage this by implementing a process to measure key KPIs daily with exception reporting, so you can tell if something unusual happens. Here are a couple simple options for exception reporting:

- Use the out-of-the-box traffic sources report and monitor it daily for variances.
- Create a pages missing parameter report, which is easily configured by adding an exclude filter to a copy of the standard pages report. That way you can see exactly which page is missing valuable parameters.
The good news is that within the Webtrends toolset there are many ways to monitor and audit your data quality. Dashboards are a great way to manage this. You can set up alerts and notifications for changes.

Learn about the alerts and notifications in A10.

Using Webtrends Explore, you can use ad hoc data exploration to answer questions that arise in your reports. Even Event Streams can help with tag auditing.

What Can You Do Today?

The effort to ensure data quality is really just one part of a solid data governance strategy. By planning ahead, setting expectations with the team about what is realistic, and not getting distracted by statistically insignificant changes in numbers, you can ensure data quality and help the team gain trust in the data.

You can enhance your data quality strategy at any time, but a big change, such as a site redesign, provides a great opportunity to enhance it.

Get more tips for a solid measurement strategy here:

Eight steps to an effective digital measurement strategy