

read his review each week in the daily newspaper, while only a few thousand would read my online road tests. I pointed out to him that it was highly unlikely that every person who received the newspaper was actually reading his article every week. I agreed my reviews were attracting a relatively small number but mine would remain online for an extended period of time, whereas his reviews would be gone the next day into the recycling bin. He would never know exactly how many people read his reviews whereas I could track readership of mine indefinitely.

As we all know, traditional publishers are in trouble as readers move en masse to the Internet, where they get the news and information they want pretty much instantly and free of charge. Originally everyone hoped advertisers would follow and income from online advertising would compensate for the loss of advertising in print versions. This has not happened—partly because the perceived value of online advertising is lower. The irony is many publishers are getting far more online readers than they attract for their print publications.

I will not get into a debate about the pros and cons of print versus digital, but I am convinced that part of the problem is that it is so much easier for publishers and advertisers to get a real grasp on who their readers are or at least where they come from when analyzing traffic on a Web site. In the long run this should help restore the value of advertising as it can be targeted so much better.

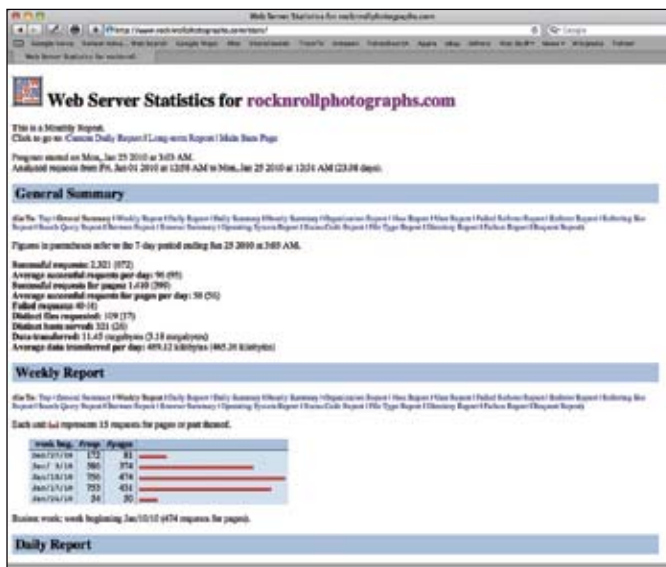
In the old analog days of newspapers, radio and TV advertisers were virtually throwing ads up in the air and hoping they would stick. They knew what the sales were for printed products but had no idea if the ads were actually looked at. Even worse, there was no way of knowing exactly who was listening to radio or watching TV so they had to rely on extrapolation from a few people to learn this.

One of the beauties of Web sites is that it is really far easier for publishers to track visitors. As in the print world, a large sub-industry has grown up catering to analyzing traffic. Most of the big publishers naturally gravitate to companies that can command high fees for their services. If you've got millions of visitors it's easy to run multiple analytical programs.

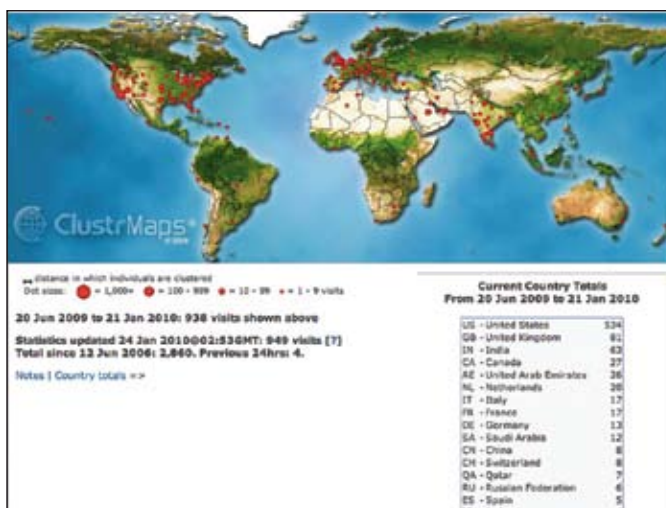
Alexa is one such company that ranks all Web sites. It is most useful for seeing the relative rankings of different Web sites. But if like most of us, your Web site is ranked below one million, it's pretty irrelevant for making meaningful comparisons. If you're intrigued to see how well big Web sites rank, you can even download the top one million ranked Web sites for perusal.

Do you know who is visiting your Web site, even though it's too small to be quantified by the big services? It is pretty easy to find out. Most Web hosting services provide a simple analytical tool, which shows how many visitors have been to your site. The amount of information available is amazing. You can find out where they came from, what search terms they used to find you, how long they stayed on your site, which pages they visited, which photos they looked at, etc.

The reports display several parameters with terms that might not be familiar. First, for example, is bounce rate. This is the term used when a visitor only visits one page on your site and then leaves. It's bad if there is little or no information on your opening page, but if you only have one page of pertinent information this is no problem. Requests are a total count of the number of times a piece of information has been downloaded from your site. A photo can be one request, as can an HTML file.



I use Dreamhost to host my Web sites and they provide a simple but thorough Web analysis tool using Web stats.



ClustrMaps (www.clustrmaps.com) is a little different from other tools as it displays a small world map on your Web site with red dots showing where your visitors have come from. I have one of these on my home page. In case you're wondering, I have no clue why I have so many visitors from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates!

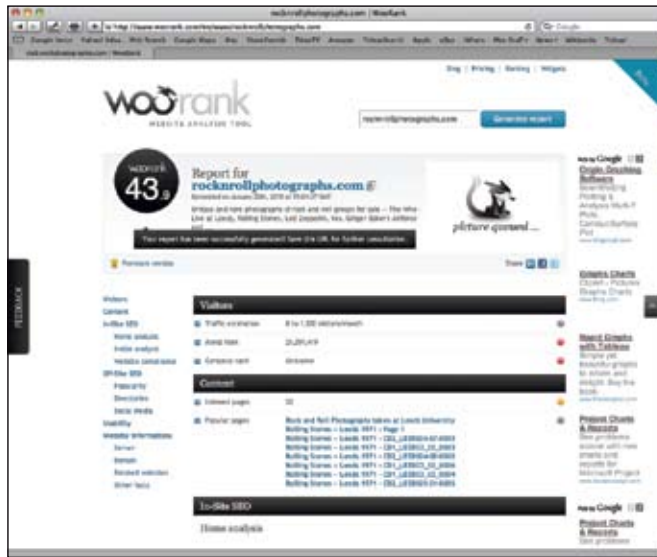


Woopra (www.woopra.com) is another service that shows where your visitors come from, in a rich graphical format.

I have created several Web sites but most of them are planned for future development, so they do not get many visitors. However, it is still fascinating to see where my handful of visitors comes from. A couple of years ago I was on a trip in Baja and uploaded some photographs. The link got posted on a Mexican blog and for a few weeks the number of visitors I had from Mexico was second only to those from the United States.

To obtain this information I was using ClustrMaps, a service that displays a small map on your Web site so any visitor can click on it to see where your visitors have come from. If you don't want to display a feature like this you can get the same information from others such as Google Analytics, which is naturally one of the most popular free services.

Although nothing has to be added to your Web site to gather information from your Web host's server logging tools, you do have to add a link on your Web site to use these other services.



Woorank (www.woorank.com) goes a step further than other services as it also analyzes how effective your site is for search-engine optimization and Web site compliance. The free service gives an overview while a deeper analysis requires a fee.

In most case it is no more difficult than signing up with the service and then adding some lines of code on the pages you want tracked. If you cannot do it yourself, your Web developer can easily do it for you.

Those of you using Flash-based portfolio Web sites, such as those built by LiveBooks, can also use many of these services although they are not as accurate since Flash-based sites do not display pictures in a format that is trackable—making it more difficult to gather a lot of information. LiveBooks describes how to insert the code for Google Analytics on a page in its support forum.

With so many Web analysis services to choose from, it's easiest to show a sampling in some screen grabs. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words. CC

John Rettie is a photojournalist who resides in Santa Barbara, CA. He has been using a computer for 30 years, and has been on the Internet for 15 years. Now he's learning how it all works—learn more and find links to resources on his Web site: www.webinsight.info or contact him directly at john@johnrettie.com