

CKE Restaurants, Inc. drives brand lift with Google Analytics.



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Justin Bain
Director of Marketing, Spacedog



ABOUT GOOGLE ANALYTICS

Google’s web analytics service enables advertisers and publishers to make their marketing campaigns more efficient and their websites more effective. Advertisers can increase their return on investment by optimizing online marketing campaigns, tracking referral sources, improving web design and content, and identifying visitor preferences. Google Analytics’ intuitive interface makes it easy to segment customers, identify top performing ad campaigns, and understand user preferences.

For more information, visit www.google.com/analytics.

Business

The growth of the now ubiquitous quick-service restaurant is a story of eager young entrepreneurs, including CKE Restaurants founder Carl N. Karcher, who fed America’s appetite for mobility and an affordable, high-quality meal. Built alongside the emerging car culture of Southern California during and post-World War II, the quick-service restaurant industry grew with the country’s expansive highways and has become a part of American life.

Today, CKE operates some of the most popular U.S. regional brands in quick-service dining, including the Carl’s Jr., Hardee’s, La Salsa Fresh Mexican Grill, and Green Burrito restaurant brands. The CKE system includes more than 3,200 locations in 44 states and in 13 countries.

Approach

For most quick-service restaurants, building their brands using the Internet is an afterthought, but CKE Restaurants is an exception. The Internet is among CKE’s top vehicles for driving brand awareness. Carl’s Jr. and Hardee’s sites are interactive playgrounds for CKE customers offering online arcades, TV commercials, interactive menus, store locators, and nutrition information. The sites also offer trailers and videos, as well as sweepstakes and giveaways from partners like New Line Cinema, Motorola, and Napster.

CKE’s spiciest spot on the Internet, with 4 million visitors within its first three weeks, is www.spicyparis.com, featuring the too-hot-for-TV spot of Paris Hilton washing a car as she chows down on a Carl’s Jr. Spicy Burger. The site also features behind-the-scenes takes of Paris, as well as a parody of the Paris Hilton commercials featuring sexy “Eugene,” who proves that hiring the right talent makes all the difference.

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“Our goal is to immerse people in CKE’s brands,” says Dustin Callif, managing director of CKE’s interactive marketing agency Spacedog. “To ensure that we’re meeting our goals, we need access to metrics such as average time spent on CKE’s websites, returning visitors and the quality of visits.”

Spacedog had an existing custom-built web analytics solution, but it fell short. “With our old analytics and reporting solution, it could take several minutes per web page to pull up even basic results such as visits, page views, and clicks,” explains Justin Bain, director of marketing for Spacedog. “We were spending so much time accessing reports that we had little time to analyze the information.”

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In need of a high-performance web analytics service with more capabilities, Spacedog signed up for Google Analytics. The agency immediately gained the insight it needed to make CKE’s marketing campaigns and promotions more effective.

Results

It was easy for the Spacedog team to start using Google Analytics, especially given its clean and easy-to-use interface. “Having a lot of data is one thing, being able to clearly sort through and visually see results is another,” says Bain. “Google Analytics has a great interface. We and CKE love the global view graphic where they can see all of the places in the world where people are visiting their sites.”

More exposure, lower costs

During the first few weeks of the Spicy Paris campaign, about 50,000 people clicked on the Spicy Burger coupon, and more than 60,000 people clicked on the restaurant locator. Upwards of 60,000 people forwarded the Spicy Paris video to friends. “This type of viral marketing, where people share and watch videos, isn’t possible on television, and getting this type of exposure with a television commercial would have cost many millions more,” says Callif.

Optimized website design

Based on data from Google Analytics, Callif and Bain can quickly see percentage changes in page views, clicks, and other metrics to gauge the success of campaigns. Among the Spacedog team’s most important metrics is average time spent on each site. As a quick-service restaurant system, CKE is less interested in clickthrough rates and more interested in how long people spend interacting with one of CKE’s brands. Data from Google Analytics pinpointed the most popular area of the Hardee’s and Carl’s Jr. sites: the gaming section, where people interact with online arcades. “We suspected that gaming was the most popular area — and with Google Analytics, we know for certain, so we can add other games to enrich the site experience,” says Bain.

Enabled one-to-one marketing

When visitors to CKE’s websites sign up for sweepstakes or promotions, Spacedog captures their information in a database. From there, relationship marketing can begin in the form of email newsletters. CKE also offers coupons on its sites, as well as a restaurant locator. Using Google Analytics, Callif and Bain can track the effectiveness of each of these strategies, something that wasn’t possible before.

Google Analytics also enables Spacedog to track the percentage of return visits, providing a barometer of the uptake of monthly promotions. The goal is to drive people back and get them to enter their information into the CKE database. In September 2005, data from Google Analytics indicated a 20 percent jump in return visitors — and 25 percent of the people who entered sweepstakes or giveaways opted in for CKE’s newsletters.

Faster insights

When millions of people hit spicyparis.com in the first three weeks, Google Analytics performed flawlessly. “With all of the data being crunched, especially for Spicy Paris, it’s been a huge boost to be able to pull up data quickly and organize it by date search, visits, clicks, and compare date ranges,” says Bain. “We’ve eliminated the long delays we experienced with our previous solution.”

“Clicks for database sign-ups, coupons, and the restaurant locator are more qualified than other interactions. We’re able to capture and capitalize on this information using Google Analytics.”

Justin Bain

Director of Marketing, Spacedog

A foundation for future marketing efforts

In addition to feeding CKE Restaurants’ databases, data from Google Analytics enables CKE’s sites to serve as market research labs to see which features drive more buzz and more coupon downloads. More important, Google Analytics is giving CKE an experimental playground for nontraditional marketing. The web is still relatively small as a percent of the company’s overall marketing budget, but the production costs and cost per impression are far less than TV.”

For a fraction of our overall media budget, we can have a sizable web presence,” says Brad Haley, executive vice president and chief marketing officer for Carl’s Jr. and Hardee’s. “And over the next 4 to 10 years, that production and media budget will shift from traditional to nontraditional, when online advertising and promotion becomes our primary medium.”

