

Google Analytics and Google Apps help The Huffington Post keep its edge.



Business



Goals:

- Develop editorial content and HTML code more efficiently
- Track site performance on a granular level and tailor content and features accordingly
- Continue to grow rapidly

Challenge

- Enable in-house and remote teams to collaborate in real time with best-in-class products
- Find a cost-effective, feature-rich web analytics package that allows staff to gather actionable site performance data
- Choose an easily scalable communication and collaboration solution while keeping costs low

Results

- Users enjoy robust communication and collaboration tools
- Google Analytics' rich set of tools and reports enable nearly instantaneous data collection and continuous site improvement
- Easily scaled services support rapid growth

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

For more information, visit
<http://www.google.com/a>

Business

Online publisher The Huffington Post has surpassed approximately 8 million unique users, becoming the fifth most popular news and commentary site on the Internet as measured by web links, according to metrics firm Technorati. Founded in 2005 by Arianna Huffington, a nationally syndicated columnist, and Kenneth Lerer, a business and media executive, The Huffington Post – or HuffPost, as it's often referred to on the Internet – features news, opinion, and links to various other news sources.



Approach

Whether the HuffPost's editorial staff members are writing a column, editing a feature or proofing a story layout, they rely on email and collaboration solutions to help them develop site content. Onsite and offshore software developers also depend on communication and collaboration solutions to coordinate their efforts to make the site more eye-catching and interesting to read.

In addition to the need for staff members to work together efficiently, the HuffPost must evaluate the success of story formats, news and other featured content. This requires web analytics software that indicates where the site's visitors come from and how they interact with the site. Although a competitive necessity, the high price of most software packages was a major drawback. "We needed to continuously isolate our products – news, editorial, blogs and more – and see how each one was performing over time, but we were stymied because most web analytics tools carry such a hefty price tag," explains chief technology officer Paul Berry.

"The reaction of our staff to Google Apps has been overwhelmingly positive."

Solution

For the company's IT infrastructure to keep pace amid its environment of rapid growth and change was a challenge. Whatever solutions the company selected to strengthen communication and collaboration and track product performance would need to scale to accommodate a burgeoning user base and rapidly expanding site.

After a detailed analysis of the available options for corporate email and collaboration, the HuffPost moved its entire user base from its previous hosted solution to Google Apps Premier Edition. The company chose Premier Edition because it met a stringent set of requirements including a low price, a lot of collaboration options when compared with other solutions, and low maintenance. Berry and his team worked with LTech Consulting, a member of the Google Enterprise Professional program, to migrate to Apps. LTech completed the Premium Edition setup for 50 users, plus personalization and migration of the previous solution, all in less than four days.

“Google Analytics gives us all the features of a high-end analytics package and delivers the data we need to continuously optimize site performance.”

Paul Berry

CTO, The Huffington Post

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.

ABOUT GOOGLE APPS

Google Apps is a suite of applications that includes Gmail, Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Talk (instant messaging and voice over IP), Google Docs (online document hosting and collaboration), Google Page Creator (web page creation and publishing) and Start Page (a single, customizable access point for all applications). Google Apps offers editions tailored to specific customer needs including Standard Edition (ideal for family domains), Premier Edition (businesses of all sizes), Education Edition (K-12 schools, colleges and universities) and Partner Edition (Internet Service Providers and portals).

Around the same time, the HuffPost adopted Google Analytics to track unique visitors, new versus returning visitors, and other vital traffic data to monitor site performance and spot trends to customize the site accordingly. Analytics was easy to implement and provided instant information about which pages and content draw and hold the most viewers. “Our ongoing goal is to keep existing viewers coming back for more and to increase our readership,” says Berry. “Google Analytics gives us all the features of a high-end analytics package and delivers the data we need to continuously optimize site performance. And at no charge, the price is right.”

Results

Users enjoy robust communication and collaboration tools

With Apps and Analytics, The Huffington Post was able to achieve its objectives. “The reaction from our staff to Google Apps has been overwhelmingly positive,” says Berry. “Most of them already had Gmail accounts, so they were familiar with the quality of Google’s offerings.” Blog and editorial teams use Google Docs to share editorial guidelines and ideas for hot news stories. The content team uses Google Calendar to create and share editorial calendars detailing scheduled content for blogs and feature stories. Docs and Calendar enable the software development staff – 60% of them located offshore – to track information such as schedules, bugs and time spent on coding tasks. Google Talk helps everyone get instant input or answers to questions. Says Berry, “Google Talk gives us a simple way to ping each other whether we are in the office or not, and the fact that Talk sessions can flow right into Gmail means we never lose track of a conversation.”

Google Analytics’ rich set of tools and reports enable nearly instantaneous data collection and continuous site improvement

Berry and his team can capture vital data such as unique visitors and bounce rates. With filters, Berry can separate subsections of the site – entertainment, politics, and business – and track visitors to each section. He can measure clicks by areas on a page, gauge conversion rates or keep a pulse on outbound clicks to show how much traffic the HuffPost generates for other sites.

Together, Apps and Analytics help the staff quickly determine editorial direction to maximize readership. When the HuffPost publishes a front-page Quick Read or other feature story, Berry and his team can use Analytics to quickly gauge traffic spikes and update the content in minutes to drive the publication’s editorial direction. The editorial calendar stored on Google Calendar is then updated accordingly, giving staff easy access to any changes even if they are on the road. “Overnight, we can shape our feature stories or Quick Read columns and share any changes with everyone on staff to create more targeted, relevant content and attract more viewers,” says Berry.

Easily scaled services support rapid growth

In addition to being a boon for the entire staff, Apps and Analytics make it easier to keep IT in sync with rapid growth because these hosted services run on Google’s powerful servers. “From the point of view of adapting and managing our IT infrastructure, the move to Apps and Analytics has been hugely beneficial,” says Berry. “We can scale our Google solutions on an as-needed basis with little advance planning and no additional up-front costs. Plus, ongoing maintenance is nil. Google solutions are a win for IT and for our users.”

