



WNYC leverages Google Analytics to create compelling online content for its award-winning radio programs.

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Bill Swersey
Director of Digital Media



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.

Background

WNYC, New York Public Radio is the most listened-to public radio station in the country, with a listener base of over 1 million weekly. Based in New York City, WNYC produces a range of daily news, talk, and cultural programming, including The Brian Lehrer Show, The Leonard Lopate Show, and The Fishko Files, as well as several award-winning programs that are distributed nationally, including NPR’s On the Media, PRI’s Studio 360 with Kurt Andersen, and Radio Lab.

In early 2006, Bill Swersey, WNYC’s Director of Digital Media, began investigating web analytics on behalf of his station and other members of the Integrated Media Association, a working group of 32 public broadcasters and networks organized to collaborate around online opportunities.

Swersey’s immediate goal for the station was to learn more about how visitors use WNYC.org and its dedicated show websites – onthemedial.org and studio360.org – so that his team and the show’s producers could make more informed choices decisions about what content to produce for the web.

To fulfill larger IMA objectives – a key part of the IMA initiative was that all stakeholders would have hands-on access – the web analytics solution needed to provide detailed information in an easy-to-use presentation and allow for individual accounts with varying levels of access.

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“We wanted a page-tag based solution that would be within reach, both in terms of the total licensing costs and the resources required for system administration, of most member stations,” said Swersey. “Something that could one day serve as the standard in the public radio world.”

After several months of investigating their options, WNYC (and Santa Monica, California-based KCRW) began pilot studies to evaluate Google Analytics.

A New Paradigm

As internet radio has become a strong alternative to terrestrial radio listening, and consumers now expect a certain level of sophistication and new information from media websites more generally, WNYC recognized the need to transform its station site & show sites from straight marketing vehicles driving on-air listenership into a critical part of the WNYC experience.

WNYC now understands its websites to be important touchpoints, providing unique opportunities for listeners to interact with the station's content and share in a community with other WNYC listeners. Indeed, no longer are the sites merely companions to the radio programs; rather they are often the first point of entry into the WNYC brand for visitors accessing the sites through blogs, web searches, and links.

The "Studio 360" and "On the Media" sites were strategically re-designed in 2006 with this orientation at its core, featuring a content management system that allows the producers to easily add and maintain site content that creates circular traffic – extending the on-air listening experience and enticing web visitors to listen via podcast and on-demand.

Since it was first deployed in mid-2006, Google Analytics has become an invaluable tool, helping web and show producers assess what's really capturing the attention of visitors.

Mission-Oriented

WNYC has a solid track record of pioneering early adoption of new technologies. The station embraced web streaming early on produced the first podcast of an NPR program with On The Media, and served as a test station for HD radio signals in New York City. Eschewing a "technology for technology's sake" approach, WNYC has seized on new technologies first and foremost as a way to more deeply fulfill our mission and get programming out to more listeners.

"WNYC produces stellar programming, but radio has always been an ephemeral medium – until now," explains Swersey. "The revolution in web and audio technologies over the last decade has given our programming greater reach and shelf life. Our work now lives beyond the broadcast."

WNYC brought this value of extending the station's mission to its approach to web analytics and web innovation.

"What we really want to do is figure out whether, given the resources we have, we are providing the content that our audience is interested in," explains Swersey. "We're not profit-oriented, but we are definitely mission-oriented. We want to be sure on the web, as on the air, we are being as useful and engaging as possible."

WNYC now tracks conversions on specific content and audience participation.

Swersey notes that even small stations have the ability to drive significant traffic to their website. "In radio, we can promote our site on the air every 10 minutes. So, how do we make the best use of that power? How do we go about creating a really effective site that expands our reach and serves our listeners? This is something that web analytics can help us address."

Thinking Tactically

Swersey's intuition about the value of hands-on access to web analytics feedback was validated within a few days of relaunching Studio360.org in September 2006. Even before his team had time to set up Google Analytics training for the show's stakeholders, they began coming to him with revelations about the site.

"Julie Burstein (Studio 360 co-creator and producer) immediately identified several issues about the site that seemed to prevent visitors from getting to important content," says Swersey. "Things that we had thought looked good on the site – such as the splash page – were in fact an impediment. Additionally, our slide show was hardly ever viewed. It was a little disheartening to see that we had been spending resources on things that didn't really resonate, but we were happy to have access to this information very early on after the re-launch."

Burstein notes that they now talk about the web differently on the show than they did prior to adopting Google Analytics.

“We saw a dramatic increase in site traffic when we changed our language from ‘visit our website for more on this story’ to more impactful, specific directives such as ‘go see a slideshow of Olivia’s Pinups’.”

She also points out that they’ve learned that audiences strongly respond to visual complements to a radio story, and prompted them to create a show around a visual campaign.

In December, Studio 360 commissioned the design firm Pentagram to “rebrand” Christmas, and the slide show of their ideas – housed on the website – was cited numerous times throughout the radio show, driving traffic to the site. Once there, visitors also found web-exclusive material, including a holiday e-card utilizing Pentagram’s designs.

Strategic on-air mention, along with blogger outreach and traditional marketing, led to a 55% increase in website visits for the “Redesigning Christmas” show. Since then, Studio 360 has been experimenting with similar tactics – and measuring the results using Google Analytics.

“Google Analytics represents a sea change,” says Burstein. “If we mention something on the air, by the end of the day, we can see how people are responding. It’s an incredible advantage over having to wait 6 months to see the Arbitron data.”

For Swersey, the most exciting payoff has been that analytics now enables producers to understand their audiences’ core interests, and funnel their efforts and creativity in a purposeful way. “Producers are no longer working in the dark, creating what might be great content but that doesn’t connect with their audience. They now have sheer numbers letting them know what’s most interesting and most useful to visitors. It’s very empowering.”

Fundraising and Beyond

Creating a more interactive web experience has given WNYC new pathways for generating revenue. A more engaged web audience is also a more invested one – and one more likely to contribute financially to WNYC. More than 50% of membership pledges now come in online.

Additionally, the station has been able to leverage these web donations against their on-air solicitations. The new model has proven to be popular with listeners – and profitable for the station. It allows WNYC to use less of its valuable on-air time for pledge drives and attract donations from web listeners “where they’re at” and in a way that fits the way audiences are now consuming media.

New Revenue Streams

WNYC has found new revenue streams through Amazon links to CDs, DVDs, and books related to on-air programming

“Being able to direct listeners to sites and information related to what they’re hearing on our shows simultaneously deepens their relationship to our content and our brand,” said Swersey. “The added advantage of Amazon is that we also have an opportunity to generate revenue.”

Other fundraising streams include an Amazon storefront, cost-per-impression sponsorships, and podcast sponsorships. Most exciting, WNYC sees the opportunity to grow significantly beyond their terrestrial radio audience. Swersey stresses that every opportunity will require creative execution based on a complete understanding what works and doesn't work on station sites.

"It's clear that Google Analytics is going to be pivotal to gaining this understanding," says Swersey.

For other public radio stations, early adopters such as WNYC provide inspiration and a roadmap for integrating analytics into station marketing. With successful pilot studies at both stations now complete, public radio stations have a model for adoption and a set of best practices.

Swersey summarizes, "Google Analytics fills a need with a great tool that WNYC and other stations can afford to use with no barriers to implementation."

