Statistics

Abstract

Chapter 5 of Library Technology Reports *(vol. 48, no. 6) "Running the Digital Branch: Guidelines for Operating the Library Website" by David Lee King focuses on statistics: analytics, insights, numbers, charts and graphs, and data. The author shares statistics that are tracked for his digital branch and for social media; he also shares reasons for tracking those statistics. The chapter discusses how analytics help meet library goals. Tools for tracking statistics are described.*

In this chapter, we'll focus on statistics: analytics, insights, numbers, charts and graphs, and data. I'll be sharing what my library keeps track of for our digital branch—both for the website and for social media. I'll also explain why we track what we do. We'll look at how analytics help us meet library goals. Finally, I'll discuss some tools you can use for tracking statistics.

Why Are Statistics So Important?

Why keep track of how many people friended you, or how many people commented on a blog post? Sometimes statistics don't even provide accurate numbers.

There are a number of good reasons why statistics are important to your website and to your library or organization, including the following.

Use Numbers for Reporting Purposes

In public libraries, you probably report to a board of trustees or some other municipal-type group. During each reporting cycle, you can gather and share statistics like door counts or total checkouts for the month.

Academic, special, and other types of libraries also regularly report numbers.

The numbers matter to the people in charge. The statistics tell them what work is being done, gives them something to measure, and tracks usage of the library and its resources. Monthly statistics can show regular growth and usage of your website. They also help administrators and board members figure out where to put dollars during budget time.

Show Interest and Engagement

Monthly statistics show library and website use. They also show engagement levels and interest. For example, if your library's website has a popular page or blog post, your statistics can show that customers read it, visited it, and interacted with it. The same holds true for social media. If you have a video or a status update that was viewed a lot, was liked and commented on, you can provide statistics that show the level of engagement.

Show How Your Statistics Line Up with Strategic Goals

Statistics are somewhat interesting and useful by themselves. But when you combine those raw numbers with your library's strategic plan and goals, statistics can show how your department or team is helping to accomplish the library's goals.

Check for Problems

Regularly checking your site's analytics can help you discover problems on your digital branch. Watch your statistics for aberrations, then try to figure out where

they originate. Catching those outliers has the potential to highlight areas that could be improved to make your website more useful.

See What Your Visitors Like

Checking analytics on content is a great way to look over your patrons' shoulders to see what they like. "Statistics can also reveal your readers' preference. You may discover that a particular topic is extremely popular or that your readers prefer blog posts that are written in the list style as opposed to more of a lengthy prose. These preferences can help you to make decisions on your future posts."[1] Once you have that information, you can use it to continue to focus on your content and create more of whatever it was that people liked.

See Who Your Customers Are

Statistics can provide insight into your customers. For example, Google Analytics shows what types of browsers, computers, or mobile devices people use when visiting your website. It also shows if they used broadband access and what screen resolution they used. This type of information is very useful when building and improving website design.

YouTube and Facebook statistics provide gender and age of your friends, followers, and viewers. Again, knowing this type of information can help you focus on specific demographics when creating content for those social networks.

What We Track

TSCPL tracks quite a few numbers and statistics each month. Right now, some of these numbers get reported to our board via a monthly board report. Other numbers, especially the social media numbers, aren't reported to others. We use those for internal tracking and growth.

Here's what we currently track.

Google Analytics

We use Google Analytics to report fairly typical statistics each month on our website. These include:

- **Page views and unique page views.** These numbers show how many people visited our digital branch during the month.
- **Average time on page.** This number shows an average of how long people stay on a page on our website. Currently, this number is 2:51. That shows that on average, visitors to our website spent almost three minutes there—long enough to

read posts or to navigate to a jumping-off point, like the library catalog or a database.
- **Bounce rate.** A bounce rate "represents the percentage of visitors who enter the site and 'bounce' (leave the site) rather than continue viewing other pages within the same site."[2] Generally, the bounce rate should be a low percentage (ours is currently 25.49 percent). This shows that on average, people stay on our site once they get here, instead of visiting a page and then immediately "bouncing" off to another website.
- **Popular pages.** We also report our most popular pages for the month.

Social Media Statistics

We track many of our social media sites. We haven't yet started reporting those monthly numbers to a larger group (like our library board). We use the monthly numbers to help show progress and growth in our social media endeavors. We will most likely start reporting some of these numbers soon.

YouTube

Here's what we track on YouTube:

- **Total subscribers.** This number shows the total number of people who subscribe to our library's YouTube channel. We want this number to go up.
- **Subscriber net change.** This number shows at a glance if we lost or gained subscribers.
- **Number of monthly views.** This is the total number of views. This number helps us figure out if our videos are being watched and if there was a particularly popular video. If I see this number fluctuate a lot, I can take a look at individual videos for the month and figure out what happened.

  For example, in February 2012, we almost doubled our usual views (9,935 versus 5,160 in January and 6,114 in March). Looking at our YouTube analytics, I can tell that there was a huge spike in viewership on February 7, 2012 (over 2,000 viewers in one day). Then I can figure out why. In this case, it looks like someone using Reddit discovered and shared our video titled "Interview with Photographer Jim Richardson." We displayed some of his photos in our art gallery and created a video interview with him. Sharing that video on Reddit caused the huge spike. We want more of these spikes!
- **Likes and dislikes.** This is an engagement measurement that counts how many times people click the Like and Dislike buttons.
- **Comments.** This provides a count of how many comments each video received within YouTube. It's another engagement measurement.

- **Shares and favorites.** This shows how many people favorited or shared a video.
- **Number of videos posted.** This shows how many videos we uploaded to YouTube. This helps me know how active we are on YouTube.

Twitter

We have five Twitter accounts. As of June 26, 2012, we have to track these statistics manually. Twitter doesn't have a built-in analytics section. We are in the process of moving official tweeting to HootSuite (see section on tools below), which includes some analytics—hopefully that will help us track numbers.

But for now, we track these things for each of our Twitter accounts:

- **Following.** The number of people we follow.
- **Followers.** The number of people following us. This should steadily rise if we are creating good Twitter content.
- **Retweets.** We track how many people retweeted one of our posts. This shows interest and engagement. To count this, I actually scroll through Twitter's Connect page and count them manually—not ideal, but also not very time-consuming.
- **Number of mentions.** This shows how many times someone mentioned us in Twitter, demonstrating interest and engagement in the topics we post.
- **Number of Tweets.** I count how many Tweets we posted for the month, mainly to figure out how much time we spent using Twitter.

Facebook

Unlike Twitter, Facebook provides an Insights section for Facebook pages. Here's what we watch:

- **Total likes.** This shows the number of unique people who Liked our page.
- **Weekly total reach.** This tracks how many friends and "friends of friends" saw our status updates.
- **People talking about this.** This shows how many people in Facebook actually did something based on what we posted. So, if someone liked, favorited, or commented on a status update, that activity will be reflected in this number.
- **Number of posts.** This number is similar to what we watch with Twitter, to help gauge our monthly work in Facebook.

Blogs

We have about twenty-four blogs on our website. We track three things specific to blogs:

- **Total subscribers (through FeedBurner).** This gives us a monthly view of subscribership. If the numbers are going up, that's good. Growing numbers mean people are loving your content enough to subscribe and word of mouth about the content is spreading. If subscribership stays static or goes down, this probably means just the opposite.
- **Total comments.** This shows engagement with the content and with the writer. If a blog gets more comments than normal for a given month, that means we need to examine the content written during that month in more detail and see what people liked (or didn't like). And then we need to figure out how to provide more content along the same vein or change direction.
- **Total views.** Total views of all posts on a blog written during that month. This number should go up.

Foursquare

We track the following things on Foursquare:

- **Total check-ins.** This number tracks the total number of people who decided to check in at the library using Foursquare. If this number goes up, it means customers are sharing where they are with their other Foursquare friends.
- **Average check-ins per day.** This is an interesting statistic. It provides an average number of daily check-ins and shows trends for a given month. If this number goes up, it means that more people are checking in daily. More check-ins means people are interested in your event or building enough to share with their Foursquare followers that they checked in to the library.
- **All-time check-ins.** A total number of check-ins. Good to watch this number grow.

Google Plus

We aren't using Google Plus much yet, other than having set up our profile and posted a few status updates. People are friending us though—both other librarians and people living in our service area. So I expect that we will eventually do more with Google Plus. These are the numbers we look at:

- **People who have added us.** This tracks the number of friends we have, and it is steadily growing.
- **Number of posts.** This shows the number of posts we have made in a month.

Flickr

Flickr is a great photo-sharing service, but it's hard to extract useful statistics. Flickr provides statistics, but not really in a usable format. It provides daily and "all

time" statistics, but not statistics for the month or even the last thirty days. Because of that, potentially interesting statistics for likes, favorites, views, or comments are difficult to get. So we don't work with these statistics, but gather these two numbers instead:

- **Total items.** How many photos we added. This shows staff engagement with sharing photos.
- **Total views.** Total views is a sneaky way to get total monthly views out of Flickr. To see the monthly total, subtract last month's total views from this month's total views, and voila!—you have a total monthly views number.

Goodreads

We have set up a library group in Goodreads. We track one statistic for the group:

- **Total members.** This number shows people who have signed up for our group. It is steadily growing.

Pinterest

Pinterest is very new, but growing like crazy. Here's what we are tracking for now:

- **Followers.** This shows the number of followers we have for our account as a whole.
- **Following.** This number shows how many people we are following.
- **Pins.** This shows the number of Pins. (A Pin in Pinterest is a way to bookmark something, like a photo, on the Web. Pinning makes that photo show up on your Pinterest page.)
- **Followers on individual boards.** This one is interesting. We have sixteen boards, mainly focused on our physical topic-driven neighborhoods in the physical library. We can get the number of followers for each board. So we watch these numbers to check for interest. If numbers on an individual board increase, we'll continue to use it. If they go down, we either need to figure out why and adapt accordingly, or we need to drop that board and focus on something else.

Tools for Tracking Statistics

Some social media tools provide useful analytics. YouTube and Facebook, for example, both provide a monthly analytics section. Other tools, like Twitter or Flickr, don't provide great ways to gather statistics.

Thankfully, there are a few options open to you when gathering statistics. You can count statistics manually, or you can use a third-party tool. Here are a few third-party tools to examine.

HootSuite

HootSuite lets you track quite a few things for your Twitter profile, including profile summary, mentions by influencers, keyword over time, compare keywords, follower growth, and Twitter sentiment. It does, however, cost $5.99 a month or more (you have to pay for the Pro account to get statistics).

Twitter Counter

Twitter Counter works great, and it's free. Twitter Counter allows you to get these stats: followers, following, Tweets, mentions, and Retweets. It tracks them hourly, weekly, monthly, and in three-month and six-month time frames.

Twitaholic

Twitaholic shows your rank compared to all Twitter users. One cool thing it does is show your Twitter rank by location, which is a really sneaky way to find other top Twitter users in your area.

TweetStats

TweetStats is another good tool. It is slow, so enter in your Twitter account name, then go get a cup of coffee and come back. What does it show? Plenty—including a monthly "how many Tweets" graph, the day and time that you tend to tweet, aggregate daily and hourly Tweets, your top replies to people, who you retweet the most, and the Twitter interfaces you use. This tool is more internally focused for the individual Twitter user, but it will give you a handy snapshot of who YOU are as a Twitter user.

HootSuite
http://hootsuite.com

Twitter Counter
http://twittercounter.com

Twitaholic
http://twitaholic.com

TweetStats
http://tweetstats.com

Notes

1. Natalia Jones, "Why You Should Check Your Blog Statistics," Helium, November 17, 2010, www.helium .com/items/2015938-why-you-should-check-your -blog-statistics.
2. "Bounce Rate," *Wikipedia,* accessed May 29, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bounce_rate.