



Measuring the Effectiveness of Your **Flash Content**

By Julie Booth, ISITE Design



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THE EVOLUTION OF FLASH

Flash is being used to deliver a better user experience in everything from product configurators to shopping carts to registration forms. Flash has also changed the face of online advertising, sending click-through rates and user response to record highs. As Flash becomes more prevalent, the expectations of both business owners and end users increase: end users expect improved ease of use and added features; business owners hold these applications to traditional standards of accountability, expecting to see a good Return on Investment for the dollars they spend on Flash development.

WHETHER FOCUSED ON REVENUE, CUSTOMER SERVICE OR LEAD GENERATION, BUSINESS OWNERS NEED TO KNOW THAT THEIR FLASH APPLICATIONS ARE HAVING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR BOTTOM LINE.

Few business owners actively measure visitor behavior inside their Flash applications. Despite the rapid growth of Flash and its widespread acceptance, measuring Flash is still not part of everyday business practices

THE PROBLEM WITH MEASURING FLASH

Business owners have long used web analytics solutions to answer business-critical questions about marketing campaign activity, e-commerce, conversion and customer retention on their web sites.

The challenge with measuring Flash is that it doesn't behave like a typical web site. As users surf the Internet, they are looking at pages and images. Web analytics solutions collect page and image data to produce reports detailing visitor behavior. To a web analytics solution, a Flash application looks just like another image on a page. Visitor interaction within Flash is not automatically recorded. In the world of online measurement, Flash is a black hole—you can see visitors come in and come out, but you don't know what happened in between. This poses a significant problem for business owners.

Many web analytics solutions now use client-side tagging technology which uses scripts inserted into web pages to measure visitor behavior. These same tags can be inserted into Flash. However, because Flash does not have "pages", that script needs to be manually inserted for each interaction that is to be measured. While measuring Flash has been possible for years, the time, resources and knowledge required has kept most web site owners from even trying.

WebTrends has made this process easier with a free extension for Macromedia Studio MX that streamlines the process of integrating client-side tags into Flash applications. What previously required custom programming has been replaced with a drag-and-drop utility that works directly in the Flash development environment. Business owners can now work directly with developers to plan and implement a Flash measurement strategy.

MEASURING FLASH

Measuring Flash begins with asking good business questions about how the application supports the different phases of the customer lifecycle:

- How does your Flash application Acquire and attract visitors to your web site?
- How Engaging is your content and how persuaded are your users to take your desired action?
- How effective is your Flash at Converting visitors?
- Is your Flash driving customer Retention and higher lifetime value?

MEASURING ACQUISITION

To understand the effectiveness of your Flash applications, you need to understand which types of visitors view them. By looking at visitor referrals, you can determine which campaigns and promotions attract visitors who engage with your Flash content. Questions to ask to assess the effectiveness of Flash advertising: What ads are most effective in acquiring visitors? Where do visitors come from? What communication channels are working the best? Are visitors responding to targeted calls to action.

MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

Flash applications are built to provide an engaging user experience. But how do you measure "engaging experience"? Web analytics can be used to answer questions about how visitors interact with your Flash content. Where are they spending time? How does this compare to time spent elsewhere on your site? Is average time spent viewing your Flash content rising or falling?

WEB ANALYTICS CAN SHOW HOW DEEP USERS GET INTO YOUR FLASH CONTENT.

By looking at your top exit points, you can pinpoint where visitors lose interest and leave your Flash application. For example if you have a "skip intro" animation, you can use measurement to see how many people view the introduction, where they exit the animation and how visitor behavior differs between those who view the introduction and those who skip it.

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— Julie Booth, *ISITE Design*

Defining content groups in your Flash application is a good way to see which content is engaging visitors. Looking at path analysis by content groups shows how users navigate within your application. Because Flash applications don’t always have a formal structure, content groups can provide an excellent way to measure how users engage with and navigate through your content.

Most Flash applications are built to persuade a user to take a specific action. For example, a site with interactive tours for each of its products can measure how effective the tours are at persuading users to take an action (e.g. purchase the product). Using web analytics, you can segment those visitors who view your flash-based product tour and compare it to those who did not. You can then see the impact your product tours have on converting users into buyers across your web site.

MEASURING CONVERSION

The success of Flash applications can often depend on how many people complete a desired action, or “convert”. Traditionally, conversion refers to product purchases or registrations. However a conversion can be any desired action. In your Flash applications this may be a “pass along to a friend”, a completed product configuration or a white paper download. It may simply be a user reaching the end of your presentation.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEFINE EACH CONVERSION POINT, AND USE ANALYSIS TO MEASURE CONVERSION RATES.

Conversion rates are simply the total number of visitors completing an action divided by the total number of visitors to your Flash application.

Flash enables you to get very granular in measuring your paths to conversion. For example, within a Flash form, it is possible to track the completion of each individual data field. You can use this information to see exactly where the stumbling blocks are. Tracking Flash at the interaction level—as opposed to the page level—provides a deeper level of understanding and insight. Remember to keep your key business objectives in mind and to only measure those items critical to supporting your goals.

MEASURING RETENTION

Businesses often invest in Flash development to create content that will drive repeat visitors. It’s critical to measure how effective your Flash content is at building customer loyalty and lifetime value. One of the simplest metrics to look at is the

repeat visitor rate. What percentage of visitors to your Flash content are repeat visitors? How does this compare to other content on your web site? More advanced retention measures include looking at the lifetime value of visitors who engage with your Flash content.

Good questions to ask are:

Which Flash applications are driving users with the highest lifetime value? How does the behavior of your loyal, returning visitors differ from your first-time visitors? Are they interested in different content? Do they complete different conversion activities?

CONCLUSION

The good news is that it’s easier than ever to measure everything that happens within your Flash applications. However, this also opens up the potential to be overwhelmed with data. To get started measuring Flash applications, ask yourself a few critical business questions and identify the key reports that will help you answer them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Julie Booth is the Director of Client Services for ISITE Design, Inc. a leading web strategy, design and development firm based in Portland, Oregon. Julie manages the development team at ISITE Design, facilitating the delivery of web applications to ISITE’s global clients. Julie has a deep background in developing online measurement strategies, analyzing data, presenting design enhancement recommendations and measuring return on investment for Fortune 500 companies.

ISITE Design is a member of the WebTrends Insight Network and is a top consulting partner with Macromedia.

TRACKING FLASH WITH WEBTRENDS REPORTING SERIES

WebTrends Developer Kit for Studio MX is a free IDE extension for Macromedia Flash MX and Macromedia Dreamweaver MX. You may download it at: <http://www.netiq.com/products/wdk/default.asp>

After installing the extension, you can imbed customized WebTrends Actions into Flash movies so that a user's actions while viewing a Flash movie are captured in the log files. The log files can then be analyzed and reported on by WebTrends Reporting Series.

If you have worked with WebTrends settings in Dreamweaver MX and want to leverage your work in Flash MX, you need to export your Dreamweaver MX settings to Flash MX. (This is an optional step.)

When working in your Flash movie to implement WebTrends Actions:

- The WebTrends Component, which runs throughout the entire movie persisting its data, should be added in its own layer.
- WebTrends Actions are then added to relevant frames of your movie so that a user's actions can be captured in the log files

The WebTrends Developer Kit includes Developer Editions of WebTrends Reporting Center and SmartSource Data Collector specifically licensed for use on your development machine. This will enable you to evaluate and test your applications locally before deploying to your production environment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the WebTrends Developer Kit for Studio MX, visit:

<http://www.netiq.com/products/wdk/default.asp>

A Quick Start Guide is also available for download at: <http://www.netiq.com/support/wdk/documentation.asp>

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