

What is “Integrated Analytics”?

By **Brett Zucker**, Chief Technology Officer, Bridgeline Software

A relatively recent innovation in Web best practices is “integrated analytics”—complete, native integration of your analytics package with your content management system (CMS) and other Web applications.

Why would you want this? By integrating analytics with a CMS, content can be updated dynamically to optimize performance levels based on accurate reporting of actual user behavior and actions tracked by the analytics package.

Seamless integration between analytics reports and the CMS enable performance-enhancing content delivery to Web pages in real time. Because content is dynamically rendered based on actual user behavior, it can significantly improve website performance and ROI.

Businesses increasingly recognize the convenience and other advantages of integrated software for Web applications. According to a 2007 report from Forrester Research, 83% of marketers embrace the idea of a comprehensive Web marketing suite, with nearly half citing “improved online customer experience” as their number one priority.

When Web applications are not fully integrated, each requires separate user logins and databases with different technology for administration roles, responsibilities and authorizations. Administrative interfaces are different, which in turn increases training requirements and slows adoption of the software.

Analytics tools can be integrated with other Web applications at three levels: the user interface level; the data and functionality level; and the content delivery level.

With native integration, your analytics software is interconnected with your other Web applications at all three levels. Such an integrated product suite is both user-friendly and provides visitors with the great content they want and demand.

Level I: user interface: In an integrated suite of Web applications, all modules including analytics, content management, e-commerce and online marketing can use the same graphical user interface (GUI). Screen layouts, drop-down menus and icons share a common appearance in all applications.

As a result, the learning curve is shortened for the user, which reduces training costs, lowers IT’s support burden and enables rapid and widespread adoption of the system throughout the enterprise. A common GUI also makes the analytics package easier to use, enabling more rapid reaction in response

to discovery on the analytics report of Web page performance issues.

Level II: data integration: With data-level integration, all applications and modules share a common data set. Sharing of information between applications enhances decision-making and simplifies site maintenance and updating.

One metric measured by most analytics packages is identification of a site’s most frequently exited pages, indicating a lack of user interest and relevant content.

When the analytics package that measures page exits is integrated with the content management system used to create those pages, you can get detailed information about when these pages were originally authored, the last time they were updated, and who created them—making it easy to track down the authors.

Page authors can make changes for you to review in-line. The date a revised page goes live on the site is time-stamped in the analytics package, enabling you to compare page views before and after revisions to see whether the edits are effective.

Level III: content delivery integration: At the deepest level, communication automatically takes place between analytics and other applications such as content management. Dynamic visitor segments and user profiling drive persuasive, personalized content to the right users at the right time. Result: enhanced user experiences resulting in higher conversion rates and revenues.

At level I and level II, the person reading and interpreting the analytics report has to instruct the people creating the pages in the CMS to make changes. Therefore, any “communication” between the analytics package and CMS is a manual process that requires human interaction and can suffer from what Forrester recently dubbed as the “action chasm”—when analytics are measured and when those reports are able to be acted upon.

With true content delivery integration, the analytics package can automatically assign user profiles to visitors based on their website usage and activity. On a financial services site, for instance, visitors reading articles on ways to enjoy retirement might be placed in a group called “retired,” while those reading content on saving enough money for retirement are placed in another user profile called “pre-retirement investors.”

Once the analytics software assigns user profiles to visitors, the CMS can extract the profile assignment in real-time and drive appropriate content to those users as they are



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content management, analytics, e-commerce and e-marketing capabilities—enabling business users to swiftly enhance and optimize the value of their Web properties.

logged onto the site. For example, a “pre-retirement investor” might be served a page on 529 programs, while the “retired investor” is served a page on estate planning.

Now let’s say users click on a “contact us” or “for more information” link. The younger investors, those planning for retirement, might be served an online form to request a quote or more information. The older investors, those already retired, might be sent to a response page that features the toll-free phone number prominently.

By customizing Web content delivery based on user profile, an integrated analytics/CMS software suite can help to ensure that each visitor gets the most relevant and engaging content. The result: greater site stickiness, longer page views, and ultimately, improved website performance and ROI.

The bottom line: when analytics and the CMS are integrated on level III, the analytics system can talk with the CMS. The analytics software can tell the CMS about user behavior, and the CMS can then alter content delivery accordingly.

The optimal set-up for efficient websites is to integrate content management, analytics and other site functions (e.g., email marketing, campaign management, etc.) on user, data and systems levels.

To achieve true deep integration of analytics with the CMS and other Web applications at all three levels—user experience, data and system—all Web software should be built from the ground up on a common platform or framework.

When analytics and the CMS are tightly integrated, the modules can easily communicate and share data in real time. The CMS can then take appropriate actions, based on metrics measured and reported by the analytics package, to deliver more relevant and valuable content to users, where and when they need it.

By providing site visitors with more persuasive content, integrated analytics greatly enhances the user experience. The result is greater user satisfaction, improved website utility and increased conversion rates and revenues. ■