Choosing a Website Statistics Solution

A Broad Range of Solutions

Most potential customers needing a website statistics solution right now, be it for their own, their organization's or their customer's website are overwhelmed by the daunting range of possible solutions available. The big question that arises from this is: *How do I choose a solution that's right for me?* This whitepaper attempts provide some ideas on how to address this.

Determining your needs

In determining the right solution for you, first of all you need to have a look at your situation and decide what you want to get out of a Website Statistics solution.

Your Situation

First of all the fact that you are exploring solutions in the website statistics market implies that you are one of the following types of users:
* A private individual with your own website which you profit from or not-profit from.
* A small, medium or large organization with a site hosted internally or by a third party web site host, with you having the responsibility of obtaining and publishing web analytics information to other parties in and outside of the organization.
* A website host with your hosting customers demanding web analytics information about the websites you host on their behalf.
* An organization that provides web consulting services to customers.
* An organization that wants to provide a hosted outsourced web analytics solution to customers as its core business.

The type of user you are will play an important role in choosing a web analytics provider as the importance of web analytics varies for the different types of users.

Your Information Requirements

Next to determine is what you need from web analytics and in what detail, this means that you have to determine the kind of information that is important to you or your customer. For instance users requiring web analytics information about a website that provides dynamic content to site visitors would differ from users requiring web analytics information from a site that provides static content. The information that Web Analytics can provide is always limited to the source of the information from which the web analytics reports are generated. A proper website statistics solution should at least provide the following information:
* Website Activity – Pages and Files requested over a period of time etc.
* Visitor Information – IP addresses, organizations, countries etc of site visitors.
* Browsers – The browsers that were used by site visitors and their capabilities.
* Website Traffic Origin – What sites referred traffic to your website.
* Search Keywords – The keywords visitors used at Search Engines.
* Advertisements – Tracking of advertisements viewed and clicked.
* Errors – The errors that occurred and the source of errors.

Types of Website Statistics Solutions

Website statistics solutions are normally divided into two categories: *real-time solutions* and *non real-time solutions*.

Real-time solutions

Real-time solutions provide website statistics scheduled or on-demand as it is happening. Technically there is no such thing as *real-time*, as information is only accurate at the

time it was actually generated. What is meant with real-time solutions in this context is that the website statistics information always states the most current state of what is happening. An important aspect of real-time solutions is that the individual who generates the information to view is mostly also the individual that will use the information in some kind of way. This is because the report generation process is separate from the data collection process from which the reports are generated.

The majority of real time solutions in the Website statistics market today can be categorized into two types (1) *Log file analysis solutions* and (2) *Tracking code solutions*.

Log file analysis solutions process web server log files and updates a database on a server. Later when a user requests website statistics reports, normally with a browser, the database is used as the source of information. To provide a *log file analysis solution* access to the web server's log files is required. A major advantage with this type of solution is that it is relatively easy to configure without requiring changes in the web content of the customer.

Tracking code solutions collect hit data and updates a database on a server. The database is used later as the source of information when a user requests website statistics reports. The hit data collected is generated by a piece of JavaScript code inserted into web pages on the content web server. *Tracking code solutions* are normally provided by a third party organization that sells the service for a monthly, quarterly or yearly recurring fee to customers. Essentially all tracking solutions functions the same way with the only difference being the information tracked with the tracking code.

Non real-time solutions

Non real-time solutions provide website statistics as it was recorded or logged at a certain time. Website Statistics reports can be scheduled or generated on-demand, but the data collection process and the report generation process normally takes place in one step. The end users of the reports are also not always the individuals that make use of the information provided by the website statistics reports. The most common non real-time solution is the Log Analyzer. Log analyzers are normally very flexible in terms of log file collection and web analytics report delivery.

Choosing a Website Statistics Provider

In addition to choosing a type of solution you would also need to choose an organization to provide the solution. We think the following criteria would provide some guidelines on choosing a provider:

Service Provider

With *Service Provider* it is meant the actual service or system that users will log onto to access website statistics information. Depending if you are going to provide the solution yourself or make use of a third party service provider to provide you (and/or your customers) with a website statistics service will play a major part in the decision making process.

Reliability

The reliability of a website statistics solution is of particular importance especially if you provide analytics as a primary or value added service to your customers.

Reputability

One thing you do not want to do is sign up with a website statistics solution provider and change to another one two weeks later. Not only consider the size of an organization you

trust your website statistics with, but also how long they have been in business and most important trust you're your gut feel.

Cost

Cost is an important consideration in any solution today. If you are willing to pay more, make sure that you get more.

Speed

In most cases a website statistics solution would need to filter through a lot of data to generate the necessary website statistics reports. It is no use to make a customer wait for report, especially when providing real-time solutions.

Development Effort

Tracking code solutions will require tracking code to be added to web pages. However in most cases Service Providers will provide some sort of application that you can use to insert the tracking code into web pages.

Solutions from SurfStats

SurfStats can provide both real-time and non real-time solutions through the SurfStatsLive Real-Time Reporting Service and the SurfStats Log Analyzer.

SurfStatsLive Real-Time Reporting Service

SurfStatsLive can provide a *log file analysis* and a *tracking code real-time solution,* which is the only product that we are currently aware of that can do both. Please refer to our website for more information.

SurfStats Log Analyzer

Our Log Analyzer is non real-time log analysis solution that can generate reports on-demand or scheduled (edition dependant).

Solutions not provided by SurfStats

SurfStats does not provide any hosting services for web analytics solutions.

Getting More Information

For Sales and Support Queries Please fill in a support form at <u>http://www.surfstats.com</u> or visit the SurfStats forums at http://pub28.ezboard.com/bsurfstatsloganalyzer.

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