

A Guide to Using Hitslink™ Traffic Analyser Software**What is Hitslink?**

Hitslink is a service that enables you to analyse the traffic that comes to your web site. It gathers information about the visitors to your site using a small script built into each page of your site by NetSecrets. The information so gathered is sent to the Hitslink database where it is accessible in your account.

A range of reports tell you how many visitors your site has had; how many pages they looked at; which search engine they used to find you and what search phrase they used. This information helps you assess rationally where your efforts should be directed to increase the success of your site.

This Guide

Hitslink has a reasonably comprehensive glossary and help section so this guide is not intended to be comprehensive. It is an attempt to define the most important reports to look at and how you might try to interpret the data. In many ways Hitslink asks more questions than it answers but does stimulate fresh thought on how your site can meet your objectives for a successful online presence.

The titles of the following paragraphs relate to the items in the left-hand navigation bar on the Hitslink main page, followed by any subsequent choices offered. i.e. the next paragraph refers to the Daily Traffic History Report which is accessed by clicking on "Traffic" then "History" then "Daily Traffic History":

Traffic > History > Daily Traffic History

This report shows a summary of visitors for the past 30 days. Generally you will be looking for a rising trend in numbers of visitors and a decrease should certainly prompt the question "Why?". It will show variations for day of week; business sites tending to drop off at weekends and consumer sites less so. You can see seasonal variations and, especially for gift sites and other business-to-consumer sites, the effect of Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, etc.

This report also shows the number of pageviews per day. If a visitor comes to the site and looks at 4 different pages that generates one "visit" and 4 "pageviews". So by comparing the two numbers you can see how many pages, on average, a visitor looks at before moving on. In general the higher the ratio the more successful your site is at engaging the interest of the visitor. If the two figures are close together it probably indicates that the home page is failing to engage the visitor's interest or that they were looking for something you don't provide.

This report also separately lists daily, monthly and all-time unique visitors. An "all-time unique" is someone who has never been to your site before; a "monthly unique" someone who has been before but more than a month ago and a "daily unique" is someone who has been before but not today. Hitslink does not count repeat visits within a single day. This data enables you to assess what level of repeat business you are receiving. For most sites it is desirable to foster repeat visits so it pays to have a strategy to make this happen. For example offering special discounts to customers who register with you. This breakdown lets you measure how well you are achieving this objective.

Traffic > By Page

This page shows in descending order how many visitors have been to which pages of your site. By default it shows this for current day but as a rule you should look at a longer timescale to get a better insight. At the top of the page you can select a longer timescale. Week or month-to-date is usually best but use your own judgement on this.

If your site sells umbrellas and fish tanks and has a page on each and your expectation is for 80% of your visitors to be interested in umbrellas and only 20% in fish tanks you would expect the number of visitors to each page to roughly coincide with that split. If not you might ask yourself if there is a bigger market for your fish tanks than you had envisaged or are you failing to put across the desirability of your wonderful range of umbrellas.

It can also be enlightening to compare "pairs" of pages. Say you have a prices page that clicks on to an ordering page. By comparing numbers you can see how many visitors looked at prices but went no further. You could, for example, reduce prices and see if this resulted in a higher conversion rate, i.e. more people moving on from the prices page to the ordering page.

Referrers > Search Engines

This report shows in descending order how many visitors have come to your site from each of the major search engines. Again select a timescale that gives you a meaningful amount of data, week or month-to-date is usually better than the default of current day.

Google in its various guises should be the biggest by far, remember that currently Yahoo and AOL merely "badge" Google's results so all should be added together. MSN is second by some distance and all others probably account for less than 10%. But this is likely to change quite dramatically during 2004 and this report will help assess the impact of coming changes.

Referrers > Search Keywords

This report breaks down visitors according to the search phrase they used in the search engine where they found your site. It can highlight why your conversion rate is lower than expected. For example NetSecrets have a site selling SMS text messaging software. It gets huge numbers of visitors searching for "free SMS" but we don't provide a free service just a paid for service. Equally we found on our web hosting site that we were getting many visitors searching for "Sequel Server hosting". We did not supply this and so the visitors were disappointed but this data prompted us to add this service to our price list and now we are getting orders for something we hadn't previously considered.

Campaigns > Activity Summary

Not all users of Hitslink will necessarily make use of this section. There is normally an extra setup charge and a higher annual cost associated with this campaign tracking service within Hitslink.

Basically it enables you to track traffic from individual sources and analyse the outcome of visits from each individual source. Used in conjunction with "pay-per-click" advertising such as Google Adwords or Overture, Espotting, etc you can calculate your return on investment for each advertising campaign. Additional scripts can be added to enquiry forms, download pages and even order-taking pages so that potentially you could see that over a given time a specific campaign led to 150 visitors of whom 25 filled in the enquiry form, 10 downloaded product data sheets and 5 placed orders.

This is set up specifically for each site and if you are interested in this service please contact NetSecrets.

Summary

Decisions relating to your online business are more likely to succeed if based on fact rather than guesswork or, worse still, prejudice. Hitslink provides much of the data needed to make informed decisions and to measure their effect. Set aside 10 to 15 minutes at least twice a week to view the data Hitslink provides and you will begin to understand how your site works for your potential customers, then you can try out improvements and see whether they make a difference for good or ill.

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