How To Read, Understand, and Use Your Website Log Files To Enhance Your Online Business

Welcome again to another edition of Aaron Dwyer's Internet Business Success Newsletter.

Well Christmas has come and gone for another year and I'm amazed at just how fast the time goes. New years is just in 2 days. I hope you enjoyed your holiday season. I certainly did. Lots of family time, which sadly I don't get enough of at the moment due to business commitments. See the Web Smart Central housekeeping section at the back of this newsletter for more information on that.

So let's get straight into the core information for this month. I want to cover website statistics and log files. It won't surprise me in the slightest if you were to tell me that you have never looked at your log files, or if you did had no idea what you are looking at.

Web logs contain valuable information about your site. By understanding the general trends and the specific activity that's taking place, you can make better business decisions. Web log analysis allows you to determine what's working -- And what's not. And that's a huge benefit for any business.

So What Exactly Is a Website LOG?

Log files are your main source of data on visitor behaviour. Every time someone comes to your site, the log file (on your host's server) records information like the keywords they used, the pages they visited and how long they stayed.

How Do I View My LOG Files?

Even a small site generates a huge amount of data. You need a tool to analyse and present it in a way that makes sense. I used to offer multiple software

programs for viewing log files but I've found the most accurate to be **Awstats**.

Since you host with me at Web Smart Central, this software is provided in your control panel. Simply log into your hosting control panel, and go to the Analysis and Log Files section and choose the Web/FTP Stats icon. You will find an icon to view your Awstats.

Awstats analyses your raw log files on the server and presents to you a set of tables and charts that you can easily read.

If you had to go through your raw log files by hand, you'd go bananas fairly quickly, they are very hard to interpret manually.

What Do I Do With All This Information?

Now that you have your log files on display in front of you, I want to draw your attention to just a few of the items. If you have any questions regarding your logs outside of what this newsletter covers then just ask me.

To help you understand your log files better, I've taken a PDF of one of my own sites log files and have included it as a second downloadable PDF with this one. It's called WSC-200612-Exhibit.pdf (click that link if you didn't download it already)

I'll reference the second PDF as Exhibit #1 etc, and you can refer to the Exhibits by their number, which is in RED in the Exhibits PDF.

See **Exhibit #1**, this is the summary area and gives you the main overview for the month you are viewing.

There are terms shown in Exhibit #1 that I'm going to explain as they are often misunderstood.

1. Unique Visits
A visit to your site by one person (no matter how

long they stay or how many pages they view) is considered a unique visit. If they leave and return, that counts as another visit.

2. Hits
Often misunderstood, a hit is a request made to the Web server. For example, if you go to a Web page that contains ten graphics files, you make 11 hits on the server: one for the page, and ten for the graphics on the page. Unique visits are a much better measure of site activity than hits.

3. Pages
Another good measure of site activity, it's the number of HTML pages served. If your visitor goes to ten pages on your site, ten page views are generated. You will want to compare page views from week to week, and month to month to see significant
trends.

Where Are My Visitors From?

You look at the Countries section of the logs on Page 3 shown as **Exhibit #2** to see where your web users are coming from. They may not be from where you are targeting, if so you need to dig deeper to find out why and how they are finding you also in the logs discussed later in this newsletter.

What About The Search Engines?
Look at the Robots/Spiders visitors section on Page 4 as **Exihibit #3**. These are not your ordinary spiders, and they represent the search engines and other automated software robots, that crawl the internet in search of new content. You want to see the GoogleBot, Inktomi Slurp (which is Yahoo) and Alexa (IA Archiver), MSNBot and any other search engine you can recognise, in this section.

It means that your site is being looked at by the search engines and hopefully listed in their results they show for your keywords you optimise for.

What are the Most (and Least) Popular Pages?

Which pages do your visitors request most (and least)? See **Exhibit #4** starting on page 4. Monitoring these stats identifies usability and navigation problems on your site. If visitors are not clicking through to a page that's important to your business you can address the problem (by modifying the navigation or the position of a link, for example) and then measure the result of the changes.

Where Are Your Visitors Coming From?

Each time someone visits your site, their browser sends a "referrer" which allows you to track where they came from. This is important because it tells you who links to your site and what search engines visitors use to find your site.

See **Exhibit #5** on page 6 for the referrers. It allows you to track the effectiveness of promotion and advertising. Referring sites may also contribute to your traffic by increasing your link popularity rating with Search Engines.

How Do You Know If The Search Engines are Sending You Traffic?

This is very simple to see by looking at Top Keywords and Phrases in **Exhibit #6** on page 6.

Pay close attention to the keywords and phrases that are (and aren't but should be) included in your site statistics. These are the words people are actually using to find your site. This information will not only help you better serve and sell to your audience, it can also lead to higher Search Engine rankings.

In Conclusion

Once again we've covered a lot of ground in this newsletter. I hope that you'll print this out and use it as a working reference when you are going over your log files and gathering that all important online information you need to make your business better.

If you are serious about your internet business, examining your logs at the end of the month as a minimum should be one of the jobs you put on your must do list.

There is so much other information in your logs, I could write a 10 page newsletter just on this topic. But I've mentioned the key items that will get you started and give you the power to make informed decisions about your site rather than just guessing.

As you become familiar with using your log files you'll wonder why you never really used them in the past, and the results will spur you on to increase your site's traffic, but most important of all increase it's conversions, making you money.

Web Smart Central News Bulletin

I'm cutting back on my work intake dramatically in 2007 to spend more time with my 3 young children and lovely wife.

What does that mean for you? On the hosting side, nothing, since I'm growing the hosting and have big plans for 2007 which I will share with you in January's newsletter.

However on the web development side, I'm reducing my small business activities and concentrating on middle to large corporate clients. I'll be phasing out maintaining and developing for my group of small business clients, sorry guys, but I'd be doing you a disservice if I tried to service

everyone at the same time, no-one would get what they want.

A Brand New Massive Server in Sydney

A new server to replace the flagging Brisbane server called Mercury, has been commissioned in a much better Sydney datacenter, with multiple redundant connections to the internet and all the bells and whistles you'd expect from a world class datacenter.

Since I'm paying top dollar for this machine, I expect a top notch uptime and service from the machine and the datacenter.

The migration went very well with only 1 hour of downtime due to a technician's error of judgment.

The kinks have been worked out of the new server and all should be well again. Please let me know if you notice any issues with your website or account.

Company Website Updates

I'll be doing an overhaul of the Web Smart Central website in Jan to reflect all the changes that has been going on with Web Smart Central over the last couple of months.

Have you Installed the Windows IE7 Update Yet?

For the majority that run Windows, IE7 has been released, I've left a note about on the blog already. The Web Smart Central site appears to be broken on IE7 so I'll be fixing that one up as well. Make sure you upgrade to IE7 so that you can check your own to make sure they display without breaking.

Client Kudos This Month

This month I'd like to publicly thank a couple of my web hosting resellers that develop sites for others and use the Web Smart Central reseller feature to act as mini hosting providers for their clients. Of course all without the hassle of running a web hosting business themselves. If you control more than 2 different websites that require their own login then I suggest you look at my reseller plans or call me to discuss your needs further.

Gregg Hales – www.kiss.com.au

Judy Smith - www.jwsmith.com.au

Warm Regards

P.S. Don't forget to pass this newsletter onto your friends and family and work colleagues since those with websites could be missing out on understanding their own log files.

P.P.S. Next newsletter I'll be discussing BLOGS and how they can help grow your business.

Subscribe To My FREE Newsletter

For your **FREE Internet Business Success Tips** with Aaron Dwyer, please visit www.WebSmartCentral.com

Did you like this newsletter? Let me know by sending an email to …
aarond@websmartcentral.com