Apress Business: The Unbiased Source of Business Information

Apress business books provide essential information and practical advice, each written for practitioners by recognized experts. Busy managers and professionals in all areas of the business world—and at all levels of technical sophistication—look to our books for the actionable ideas and tools they need to solve problems, update and enhance their professional skills, make their work lives easier, and capitalize on opportunity.

Whatever the topic on the business spectrum—entrepreneurship, finance, sales, marketing, management, regulation, information technology, among others—Apress has been praised for providing the objective information and unbiased advice you need to excel in your daily work life. Our authors have no axes to grind; they understand they have one job only—to deliver up-to-date, accurate information simply, concisely, and with deep insight that addresses the real needs of our readers.

It is increasingly hard to find information—whether in the news media, on the Internet, and now all too often in books—that is even-handed and has your best interests at heart. We therefore hope that you enjoy this book, which has been carefully crafted to meet our standards of quality and unbiased coverage.

We are always interested in your feedback or ideas for new titles. Perhaps you’d even like to write a book yourself. Whatever the case, reach out to us at editorial@apress.com and an editor will respond swiftly. Incidentally, at the back of this book, you will find a list of useful related titles. Please visit us at www.apress.com to sign up for newsletters and discounts on future purchases.

—The Apress Business Team
Contents

About the Author .............................................................. vii
About the Technical Reviewer ............................................. ix
Introduction ........................................................................ xi

Chapter 1: Overview .......................................................... 1
Chapter 2: Blogalytics ......................................................... 9
Chapter 3: Getting Traffic for Analytics ................................. 23
Chapter 4: Reviewing Performance of Campaigns .................. 37
Chapter 5: Fun with E-Commerce Analytics Part I: Shopify ....... 53
Chapter 6: Fun with E-Commerce Analytics Part II: AdWords ...... 83
Chapter 7: Fun with E-Commerce Analytics Part III: Gumroad ... 107
Chapter 8: Exploring Google Analytics Certification ................ 129

Index ............................................................................. 139
About the Author

Todd Kelsey, PhD, is an author and educator whose publishing credits include several books for helping people learn more about technology. He has appeared on television as a featured expert and has worked with a wide variety of corporations and non-profit organizations. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Benedictine University in Lisle, IL (www.ben.edu).

Here’s a picture of one of the things I like to do when I’m not doing digital marketing—grow sunflowers! (And measure them. Now there’s some analytics for you!)

I’ve worked professionally in digital marketing for some time now, and I’ve also authored books on related topics. You’re welcome to look me up on LinkedIn, and you’re also welcome to invite me to connect: http://linkedin.com/in/tekelsey
About the Technical Reviewer

Brandon Lyon is an expert in SEO, SEM, and Social Media and Web analytics, and is President of Eagle Digital Marketing (https://www.eagledigitalmarketing.com), a full-service agency in the Chicago area. When he isn’t advising local business owners and CEOs of mid-sized companies, he enjoys hockey and doing his best to survive the occasional subzero temperatures. Brandon enjoys helping companies face the challenges of the future with optimism, including navigating the treacherous waters of the Amazon ecommerce river, and taking advantage of the goldmine in marketing automation.
Introduction

Welcome to web analytics!

The purpose of this book is to provide a simple, focused introduction to web analytics, and Google Analytics specifically. It’s geared toward employees who may be working at a company or non-profit organization, for students at a university, or for self-paced learners. The approach is the same one that I’ve taken in most of my books, which is conversational, friendly, with an attempt at making things fun.

The experiment is to find a way to help people get started with digital marketing in a way that is fun and helps build skills—maybe through an internship, paid work, volunteer work, freelance work, or any other type of work. The focus is on skills and approaches that can be immediately useful to a business or non-profit organization. I’m not going to try to cover everything, but just the things that I think are the most helpful.

The other goal is to help you leave any intimidation you have in the dust. I used to be intimidated by marketing, and now look at me. I’m a marketing strategist and an assistant professor of marketing! But I remember the feeling of intimidation, so part of my approach is to encourage any reader who may feel uncertain about the field.

The fact is that web analytics has a lot of options, and there’s a lot of material out there. It can be overwhelming! But it can also be very doable, if you leave intimidation in the dust, take incremental steps, try things out, and build your confidence.

For example, I had a friend who used to be a journalist, and he was looking for new career opportunities. I helped get him started in digital marketing, and one of the first things he ran into was feeling overwhelmed by all the options, including all the articles about all the options. “There are so many tools out there!,” he used to say, “How am I ever going to learn all of them??”

The answer is that you don’t need to learn all of them. No one can. The thing to do is focus on trying some of the tools and skills and go on from there. I encouraged my friend not to worry about trying to learn everything, but instead to just learn some basics.

The friend worked with the basics, gained experience, and was able to find a local agency that gave him a shot at doing some freelance work. The career didn’t easily develop for him—he had to put effort into it. But a few years later,
he’s doing full-time freelance work in digital marketing. He was able to leave intimidation in the dust, and I believe he’s also had some fun with it too.

LinkedIn showed digital/online marketing as a top skill that got people hired in 2013/2014, and web analytics is one of the core skills for online marketing—this includes being able to understand the performance of web sites and ad campaigns. Analytics is considered a part of business intelligence, which also figures prominently on the list:

Each year the way they refer to digital marketing seems to change, but since 2013, digital marketing (of which analytics is a core part) has been at the top. Demand will fluctuate over time, but we are talking about the top skills in any field that get people hired.

- 2016: https://blog.linkedin.com/2016/10/20/top-skills-2016-week-of-learning-linkedin

One of the other things I’ve seen in my career, which I try to reinforce in these books and in my classes, is the way that the core areas of digital marketing are related. For example, I consider web analytics to be tightly connected to all other areas in digital marketing. Content is key in digital marketing, as you’ll learn if you read my book *Introduction to Search Engine Optimization* (Apress, 2017), and advertising campaigns on search engines (AdWords) and social media take content and put it out there.
At the end of the day, you need analytics to measure the performance. That makes it super important.

This book mentions what I call the core areas of digital marketing: Content, AdWords, Social, and Analytics (CASA for short). My goal is to reinforce how all the areas are connected. AdWords is Google's tool for creating ads for search engine marketing. The inspiration came from my professional background, as well as looking at trends in the marketplace.

**The Core Areas of Digital Marketing**

**C**
Content/SEO: search engine optimization is the process of attempting to boost your rank on Google so that you get higher up in search rankings when people type in particular keywords. Higher in search rankings = more clicks. The top way to boost rank is to add quality content that is relevant for your audience.

**A**
Adwords: the process of creating and managing ads on Google (Adwords), where you attempt to get people to click on your ads when they type particular keywords in Google. You pay when someone clicks.

**S**
Social Media Marketing: the process of creating and managing a presence on social media, including making posts, as well as creating advertisements. The main platforms are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as Instagram and Pinterest

**A**
Analytics (Web visitors): You can gain valuable insights when you measure the performance of your websites and advertising campaigns. Google Analytics allows you to see how many people visit your site, where they come from and what they do.

Best wishes in learning web analytics and Google Analytics!
Overview

This chapter takes a look at what analytics is and introduces related concepts. This chapter, and the entire book, is oriented toward beginners. My goal is to encourage you to consider learning more about analytics, including using a tool called Google Analytics, and to see if I convince you that it actually is fun.

Web analytics is becoming increasingly important to online marketers, as they seek to track return on investment (ROI) and optimize their web sites. We’ll learn about Google Analytics, starting with creating a blog and monitoring the number of people who see the blog posts and determining where they come from.

Don’t Be Alarmed: Analytics Can Be Fun

So I remember when I started working in various jobs after college, that one thing I knew for certain is that I didn’t feel like I was a “numbers” person. Accounting, finance, or any other type of numbers always seemed foreboding, and outside my experience and comfort zone. It was the last possible door I wanted to walk through, and to get me through it, you’d have to drag me.
But the interesting thing was that I got my first taste of analytics without even realizing it.

I created a web site with a friend, and we wanted to know how many people were visiting it and where they were coming from, so we searched for a tool that would help us with that. That tool became a part of our toolbox.

It was fun. Getting to see who was coming, what the traffic was like, was really interesting.

Then, in later work experiences, including some where there had been transition in the companies I worked for, including layoffs, I became more sensitive to how these roles related to the overall business.
At one point, a mentor gave me some advice that really helped me. She was experienced and she said to me, “Todd, you need to follow the money trail”.

She wasn’t saying, “bow down to money.” She was just saying, it’s good to understand how money flows through a business—what makes money and what costs a business money.

My perspective on money and finance was challenged, and I realized that it would probably be a good idea to consider not just what I felt like doing, but what would be a benefit to a business or organization—especially during hard times, such as a recession, or competition, etc. I also started to understand that the kinds of skills and roles that had a direct impact on helping a company succeed were in high demand.

This path led me to pay more attention to online marketing in particular, as well as social networking to a particular degree. In the midst of hard economic times, Google was increasing in value, at a time when many or even most companies were having serious financial issues. It was partly because Google was helping companies do a good job of tracking ROI with Google ads—AdWords. AdWords helps businesses know what they are making based on what they are spending in terms of online ads.

As I grew and matured, I also realized that web analytics was an important skill and I started learning more about it. It helped me find work and be competitive.

While I’m still not “passionate” about numbers, I do see things like Google Analytics as an important tool. Maybe I’m more in touch with my inner analyst.

My recommendation is, seriously consider learning web analytics, in order to strengthen your career. It won’t hurt, and it can also be fun.

Another thing I suggest with web analytics in particular, and in any situation where you are dealing with numbers based on purchases, is to remember this aphorism. It may look like a bunch of numbers:
Chapter 1 | Overview

But it's really not about the numbers, in the end. It's about the people:

Personal ROI: How Analytics Will Help Your Career and Your Organization

Learning analytics can have a significant impact on your career, regardless of the area of digital marketing you work in.

Social Media Marketing

It's increasingly important for social media marketers to understand how to measure and optimize the performance of campaigns—you might call this “social analytics”. If you haven't read my Introduction to Social Media book yet, you might want to have a look. It includes some coverage of social analytics. You could also work your way through this book and then head on over to that one, to see the connections.

Digital/Online Marketing

The goal of digital marketing is often to sell something, or at least to get people to visit and sign up for something. So web analytics is a crucial tool for monitoring how your efforts are going.
Business Intelligence

You could think of this as “advanced analytics”. Business intelligence might include web analytics (reviewing the performance of your web site and associated marketing), but it can also extend into other areas, such as “competitive intelligence,” by using a tool like compete.com or just looking at financial trends. In my own experience, starting out with web analytics helped me understand how online marketing and reports fit into overall business intelligence. It would be fair to say that business intelligence is ROI.

You don’t need any skills to start off, and you don’t need to be a numbers person. This book is for anyone who wants to get a job in online marketing or who wants to learn how the performance of their web sites fits into the business model. Google Analytics is one of the top tools, and web analytics can be a competitive differentiator in the job market, whether it’s one part of a skillset or a dedicated role.

Note This book is intended to help students to view web analytics info and learn how to develop insights. Skills in this area connect to other areas, such as search engine marketing and social media marketing, and provide a network effect to help students become more effective online marketers, as well as more employable.

Here’s a suggestion and invitation, for your “personal” ROI, that I want you to consider—become Google Analytics qualified. This book is an introduction to the concepts and the tool, and then I’ll point you to more learning material that Google has, which you might want to pursue in order to get qualified. See Chapter 8 for more details.

Basically, having this qualification on your resume or LinkedIn profile will help to show your credibility, to your colleagues and potential employers. In short, it will help your career.