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# Beyond the Click: Nine Tips to Improve Measurement

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### About The Author:

Scott Severson is the president of ARANet, Inc. Its Adfusion product, an article-based cost per click advertising platform, is one of the nation's most dynamic online advertising networks. For more information, visit www.AranetOnline.com or call 866-755-1486.

It's no secret that online marketing campaigns are often measured in clicks. But clearly there is a better gauge.

As more and more marketers shift their budgets online, they're discovering what new-media specialists have known for quite some time: counting clicks just doesn't cut it. Clicks, on their own, simply aren't able to adequately tell the story of a campaign's success or failure.

But despite all the data that's available, the process of tracking what's working -- and what isn't -- doesn't have to be overly complicated. As we've helped our clients develop, implement and measure online campaigns (within our Adfusion network of many of the top online news sites, we analyze billions of data points each month) we've learned a lot about the most effective ways to measure and optimize a campaign's success.

Based on that experience, here are nine tips designed to help improve measurement and boost your online marketing campaign's ROI:

**Remember your objective.** Always keep in mind that you're not mounting a campaign to generate clicks; you're looking to sell products or ideas while building brand awareness and preference. An important part of measurement is about identifying and setting clear and measurable goals before you begin, and then measuring against those benchmarks.

What do you want a site visitor to do? Where on the "conversion continuum" does your campaign goal fall? Is it simple -- generating a site visitor? Or is it more complicated -- completing a transaction and capturing payment?

**Outline your costs.** Once you set your objective, determine a maximum allowable marketing cost per inquiry before you move forward. Determine not only what that action will cost, but how much it's worth to you. In addition to laying the groundwork for accurate ROI tracking later in the campaign, understanding your allowable cost will help you set realistic expectations at the outset.

**Track sales data.** Always tie traffic back to measurable results. Tactics that drive traffic to a site are important, but are they converting? Employ a promotion code or similar method to measure the traffic that arrives at your site and track it as it proceeds through your conversion funnel to the completion of your success metric. Use a unique promotion code for each traffic source or new creative version.

**Measure attitude/perception shift.** At the same time, objectively measure how your campaign is changing attitudes or building awareness. Surveys are an effective way to generate valuable data about your overall marketing efforts. Anecdotal feedback from customers -- including posts on social networking sites or old-fashioned letters and emails -- aren't as measurable, but they also tell an important story.

**Keep attribution in mind.** Always work to measure how a campaign is achieving your goals downstream through the "attribution" connections they are creating to you and your products. This can often be a challenge, but it's a critical piece of the measurement puzzle. When you consider that most users that are exposed to your media will not click though -- clicks are not what you want to measure. Today's online marketers realize that users don't visit Google and search for a particular brand on a whim, something influenced that action. So be sure to look at the whole picture of how all your online messaging and media is working together to build your brand and drive traffic to your site.

**Find partners that support your analytics efforts.** Many vendors limit the data they provide to their clients. Look for companies that pass the most critical data back to you to help you optimize your campaign. Getting the whole picture lets you hone in on where you're most successful, and where your efforts are falling flat.

**Don't succumb to "analysis paralysis."** Today's online tactics allow you to track a response down to the smallest detail. But don't overdo it. There's so much data available that it's easy to get overwhelmed. We call this "analysis paralysis," and it can waste valuable time and resources. You can measure every single sliver of data about how consumers interact with your site. But do you need to? Limit your data collection to what's actionable and limit testing scenarios to what's measurable.

**Scrutinize your toolbox.** Ask yourself if you really need expensive and often complicated analysis and measurement tools. Google Analytics is an effective -- and free -- option that offers a considerable amount of data in a user-friendly format. Consider products that offer more sophisticated -- but also more expensive -- measurement and optimization, but only if you need more complex analysis.

Whichever data collection and analysis tool you use, make sure it can all be validated. Online marketers can learn a valuable lesson from our colleagues in the direct mail business: in order to ensure accurate analysis, always, always test to establish a control. Then, use the data you gather to make decisions about next steps, and direct your resources toward the most effective tactics.

**Adapt.** Remember that your campaign doesn't need to be perfect the split-second it launches. Take advantage of the Web's flexibility and adaptability, and make adjustments as you go. Establish a baseline before you begin, and work to improve upon your current results. Then, during the next campaign, make further improvements.

Set clear, reasonable and measurable goals at the outset, then use the data generated by your campaign to assess which tactics are working -- and which aren't. Ask yourself tough questions: Are your tactics meeting your success metrics? Are you achieving your allowable cost goals? Most important, learn from each effort, and use the data you gather to improve your next campaign.

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