

Introduction

User Intelligence (www.userintelligence.com) is a User Experience consultancy firm based in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. This report describes the results of our review of the WAA website and is our submission to the Web Analytics Championship. The objective for this review was to deliver insights that help guide improvements for the WAA website.

In order to get a thorough understanding of a product we believe that the analysis should focus on the *complete* context (see illustration below). With information on the *target audience* and the *goals of the WAA*, it is possible to identify the *goals of the WAA website*. Subsequently, the review can show to what extent these goals were met and identify opportunities for improvement.



Unfortunately, the briefing provided with this championship did not include enough information on the target audience and goals of the WAA. Normally, we would try to get a better briefing, before we would start the website review. However, in this specific case (e.g. championship) we came up with the site goals ourselves:

1. Attract visitors
2. Increase involvement
3. Increase online interaction between visitors
4. Inform audience

Our review focussed on getting insights for these goals. Our approach combined an Expert Review (evaluation by several usability experts) with an analysis of the web data provided, as this qualitative and quantitative methods work well together. As far as the web data is concerned, we only used data for the month of May. This is because we found the data in June to be influenced by activity generated by the WAA Championship.

1: Attract visitors

Visitors: The website seems to be attracting a fair amount of visitors. However, given that there is limited data from previous months yet (e.g. benchmark); it is hard to determine whether the full potential is being met. Furthermore, it is impossible to verify whether all groups within the target audience (practitioners, consultants, etc) are finding the website. An online survey can be used to find out who is coming to the website.

Traffic sources: 56% of the visits come from organic search (primarily Google). Direct traffic adds up to 19%, which is positive as this is an indication of the authority of the site, quality content and a strong brand. Furthermore, the site gets traffic (24%) from referrals (eMetrics, WA groups, WA blogs, etc). The information on traffic sources is useful (for example: we found that the English Wikipedia article on Web Analytics did not include a link to the WAA website yet), but the data could give more insight if comparisons to previous periods could be made. This would make it possible to see *changes* (e.g. new search terms) and act upon that.

Geographical distribution: Visitors are mainly from North America; 11,220 visits and 280 members vs. 3,275 visits and 17 members from Europe. To our reviewers the website appeared to be very US oriented, which is in line with the actual geographical distribution of the visitors. However, if the WAA wants to attract more visitors from outside the US, the WAA website should become more globally oriented in its content (jobs, events, etc).

Newsletter: The newsletter of May resulted in an additional 260 visitors, although the number of subscribers is unknown. These visitors only account for 1.51% of the total visitors. However, the positive impact of this marketing initiative could be magnified if non-members of the WAA could subscribe to the newsletter as well.

2: Increase involvement

The second goal of the website is to increase the involvement of visitors with the WAA. This involvement can take numerous forms: non-members visiting the site, visitors that become members, members that login, members that participate in committees, etc. Ideally, we would be able to monitor all types of involvement. Unfortunately, this is not possible given the available data, so we will focus only on a few of them.

Become a Site User: The possibility to become a 'Site User' is not clearly shown or explained. The data is inconclusive; however it appears that no visitor registered as a Site User except for professional members that are automatically registered when they become a member.



Become a Member: The Expert Review identified several issues with the membership registration process. First of all, it is important for visitors to be able to quickly get an overview of the membership options and the associated benefits. However, the Membership-page lacks focus and obvious call to actions. The web data should support this finding given that only 10% of the pageviews proceed to apply for membership and 20% exit the site. However, a lack of benchmarks and poorly implemented funnel analysis means that this web data is inconclusive. In addition to this, the membership application form is long and difficult. We recommend that the form should be shorter, broken into steps and that there should be different forms for the different types of membership. This should result in an improved user experience and make the process easier to measure. It is important to note that there is a high incentive for becoming a member so an improved registration form will not necessarily lead to a higher conversion rate than we have observed in the web data.

Members that login:

Although the number of WAA members is unknown, one would assume that members should account for a large proportion of visitors. Given the current web analytics implementation, it is only possible to identify members if they login. From the 12,962 unique visitors, only 330 visitors are members that login. Apparently, only a few members can be persuaded to login and access the exclusive members' content.

Returning visitors: Return visitors account for 30% of the traffic. In addition, the statistics show that returning visitors have 51% more page views and stay 63% longer on the site. Not only are return visits a good indication of visitor involvement, but it is also illustrates the importance of retention.

3: Increase online interaction between visitors

Increasing the online interaction between visitors is an important goal of the WAA website, as is shown by the dedicated Networking section. This section includes a message board, videos, photos and blogs. However, these interaction tools appear to be relatively inactive compared to the thriving WA Yahoo Groups message board (5000 members and generates >100 new messages per week) outside the WAA website. The good news is that there is an active community, but perhaps all interaction should happen on the WAA website.

4: Inform audience

One of the main goals of the WAA website is to give visitors a variety of information related to Web Analytics. Within the website, the sections; Job board, News, Articles, Events are currently dedicated to this.

Popular Content: All sections seem to generate a fair amount of traffic. Although the sections; Job Board, Membership and Articles are more popular than the rest, the Education section appears to generate the longest visits.

Information Architecture: The Expert Review found that navigating through the site using the global navigation is not a real issue. However, finding information on specific topics can be challenging in the hierarchical site structure. Additional navigational systems are needed to improve the findability, such as related links, faceted navigational, best rated articles, etc. The website already features a sitemap and search, but these have been poorly implemented. Data seems to supports this view, for example, there appears to be a significant proportion of visitors that click between the sections Resources, Articles and Education.

Search: The site search is difficult to find, which is supported by the fact that only 0.48 % of the visitors are using it. Given the low number of search queries, no conclusions can be made regarding content that is hard to find or missing. Including a site search in the header of the website will increase the findability of content.

Conclusions

By combining a quantitative method (e.g. Web Analytics) with a qualitative method (Expert Review), we were able to identify a number of improvements. However, the review also gave a lot of questions! In itself this is not bad, but unfortunately many of them could not be answered at this moment.

The most important questions were about the target audience, the goals of the WAA, and the subsequent goals of the WAA website. These questions can only be answered by the WAA itself. In addition, many questions could not be answered as there was limited benchmark data available. It is therefore necessary that more web data is collected in the next months, allowing the web analyst to identify changes. Finally, some questions could not be answered by Web Analytics at all. We therefore suggest that the WAA will use additional methods for getting user feedback and insight, such as online surveys and usability tests.