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## Effective Diagnosis of your Website's Performance Requires a Two Dimensional Approach

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It has become quite the juggling act for website owners to manage and monitor a site that caters to multiple audiences, while trying to improve and maintain a peak level of site performance. While the goal of current site design is to create an interactive experience delivering more relevant content to users, websites have become increasingly more complex as a result. The best methodology for evaluating and enhancing website performance is to merge site behavioral metrics with attitudinal survey data, enabling site owners to effect changes that serve to minimize user pain point areas and optimize their overall web experience.

Traditionally, website satisfaction research has been aimed at monitoring shifts in site satisfaction and providing high level explanations for these shifts. For instance, satisfaction has increased in the current month as users found the content more up-to-date compared to last month. This approach to delivering results was useful because many site owners only needed to maintain a high level understanding of their website's performance. However, as sites become increasingly more complex, site owners are demanding more than just "taking the pulse" of the metrics. What they are looking for is a complete set of "diagnostics" that empower them to make both short- and mid-term fixes to their web properties.

Website satisfaction surveys, as most research firms continue to provide, are no longer able to meet this need and should be characterized as "feedback" mechanisms rather than website optimization tools. Also, in providing a quantitative overview of the website landscape, traditional analysis utilizes advanced analytics (such as regression) which require a large sample and only deliver macro-level recommendations. Increasingly, and to provide context and more meaningful qualitative data that resonates, site owners have turned to usability studies. Complicating the issue, these studies are one-point-in-time, snapshots and are not an optimal way to meet the needs of site owners who remain in need of a methodology that can offer suggestions for continuous improvements to their website, and at a reasonable price.

In an attempt to fill this ever expanding gap for website owners, other (metrics) companies are now dabbling in the arena of conducting online surveys. Their hook is different than traditional research companies; they link attitudinal and behavioral information to provide a better understanding of website performance. However, site metrics companies are not research companies. These companies focus on providing as many data-points as possible to the site owners, not on data analysis leading to actionable recommendations. As such, site owners are left with little more than high level feedback, conducted in an un-scientific manner,

along with a great deal of behavioral data. And still no clear recommendations on how to improve their site's usability or functionality.

Many times these site owners are left feeling they could have gotten the same value from a page-level feedback tool. Companies that provide a simple feedback mechanism that is good for collecting open-ended verbatim responses should not be used to plan strategy since there are no sampling checks-and-balances around the collection of the data. Data collected in this type of non-scientific manner should never be used to develop strategies - since the data does not accurately represent the experience of site visitors.

Combining both behavioral and attitudinal data for analysis forms the foundation for making continuous improvements to the website. Correspondingly, the data collection methods and analysis are the key to providing actionable, usable information to site owners.

### **Fortune 100 Example**

A Fortune 100 company was recently faced with an issue regarding its worldwide site of over 300,000 pages. They were trying to determine why a key metric - links leading to the correct content - had declined (in one month from May to June), but there was no significant downturn in satisfaction ratings over the same period. Looking at the attitudinal data, it appeared that links on the site were no longer effectively directing users to the desired content. However, this was not enough information to provide site owners with direction to fix the problem.

Analysis of behavioral data involved splitting the website into various sections and then cross-comparing attitudinal scores, section-to-section. As you may imagine, this would not be an easy task on a website with well over 700 sections. Nevertheless, we were able to pinpoint the location of the deterioration in the "links" metric, a section of the site that was over 100 pages deep.

The next phase involved a systematic analysis of key index pages within the poorly performing section in order to find a key point of intersection where users converged, that faced this similar issue with the links. Of the indices pages, there was one that had a significantly higher percentage of users that fit our criterion of 'rating the site poorly' in terms of links leading to the wrong content.

Due to the small sample size, the final piece of the puzzle was now qualitative in nature; this involved an audit of the pages users visited to get to the 'index page', as well as high traffic pages where users were directed from the index page (see Figure 1). Working backwards and forwards, we were able to find a page that preceded the index page that contained an important link that was 'dead' – this was initially intended to lead visitors to the index page in question where we uncovered an intersect of users who rated the links as 'poor'. As such, we were able to uncover the issue down to the page level and provide an actionable recommendation to the site owner - replace the dead link with the correct link.

Figure 1: Determining Specific Cause of Poor User Rating for “Links” Metric



The recommended change resulted in a 10% increase in the scoring of the links metric and a subsequent 4% increase in overall visitor satisfaction. Although the solution may seem fairly straightforward and simple, only merging both behavioral and attitudinal data enabled us to identify the exact page that needed to be corrected -among 300,000+ pages of a global website – all within a matter of hours. Speedy execution, accurate information and constructive, actionable advice all prove to be the key elements of an effective and functioning site.

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