# ComMetrics

**Benchmark smarter. Perform better.**

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## Just the facts

| | |
|---|---|
| Title | **Getting solution-driven answers => ComMetrics eBook series #2010-03** |
| Author | Urs E. Gattiker – benchmark your blog(s) at My.ComMetrics.com – powered by CyTRAP Labs |
| Short description | How exactly can designers, medium-sized enterprises and your organization boost their brands? Do 600,000 Facebook friends equal even one sale? We address how you can steer clear of the pitfalls and get your blog hits to trickle down to your bottom line. Tips and mini case studies are used to further facilitate application of the discussed concepts in practice. |
| Version number | 2010-03-15 ComMetrics eBook Series #2010-03 |

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## ComMetrics eBook series

The ComMetrics eBook series helps readers benchmark smarter to improve performance. Topics and issues may range from risk management and social media monitoring to blog benchmarking.

An important focus is to provide insights that empower readers to develop customized approaches that suit their needs. In turn, these insights can be applied in for-profit as well as not-for-profit organizations. It provides the framework to make any necessary adjustments to consider important organizational context issues (e.g., industry, resources and other key parameters) that affect one's options.

> *It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.*
> – Charles Darwin

This book is part of the section on **benchmark essentials**, which includes
- #2010-01 – Why benchmark social media?
- #2010-02 – What is your social media mission?
- #2010-03 – Getting solution-driven answers
- #2010-04 – Focusing on quality traffic with social media
- #2010-05 – How it all makes your data matter

*You can **get these books for FREE** by registering yourself at My.ComMetrics.com - **benchmark your blog** => improve performance*.

These days, even the most successful organizations face new and unexpected challenges. Traditional approaches to marketing and customer relations that worked in the past are no longer sufficient to meet the demands of a changing marketplace.

The ComMetrics eBook series provides the latest insights, strategies, and tools needed to navigate uncertain times and position your company for the next evolution of social media and the Internet.

# What is the issue?

The ComMetrics eBook Series on **benchmark essentials**[1] began with "#2010-01 - Why benchmark social media?" and "#2010-02 - What is your social media mission?"

EBook #2010-03 addresses "Getting solution-driven answers" by focusing on best practice issues and SMART metrics (see below).

## What do people usually ask first?

The question asked all over the world by those working with luxury brands and products without a satisfactory answer, is:

- Do 600,000 Facebook friends and 100,000 blog subscribers equal even four sales?

Put differently, how can designers, hotels and quality stores use blogging to boost their brand?

> Observations will not take you far: they are facts without insight.
>
> You must consider context to gain insight.

One way is to follow Emmanuel Ungaro's example of reviving a brand by **finding the single most searched name online – Lindsay Lohan**. He then signed the twenty-something American actress and tabloid staple as artistic adviser of his fashion line. **Ms Lohan may not be a fashion talent but she has a talent for attracting attention**, which is exactly what Ungaro needed.[2]

This **decision set the web humming**. Unfortunately, comments may be neither positive nor help sell very many teeny-weeny tube dresses that look like high fashion knock-offs of 1970s disco wear.

So the question remains **how we can measure the effect of social media and corporate blogging on our bottom line?**

Much of the early success in social media comes from business to consumer (B2C) companies such as Amazon. Unfortunately, searching the phrase "social media case study" yields few, if any, that address business to business (B2B) success stories.

This guide focuses in particular on B2B issues. If you sell products to wholesalers, legal services to companies or advisory/consulting/expert services to corporate clients and want to use social media more effectively, this is your book.

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[1] You can receive the ComMetrics paper series within 48 hours by registering yourself at My.ComMetrics.com. #2010-02 and #2010-03 will be emailed to you once you begin benchmarking your blog using our software, at no cost to you.

[2] Perils of web search for inspiration by Vanessa Friedman, Financial Times, p. 9, October 6, 2009: www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b3b94448-b20f-11de-a271-00144feab49a.html

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## Before you start: Has your team answered these questions?

The following issues must be discussed and the answers written down. Try to keep it short, but it is critical to have these questions answered so that all team members or are on the same page.

1. **Who are you selling to**? Selling to consumers (B2C) (e.g., soap) versus direct to other businesses (B2B) (e.g., printing services, tax advisory) or not-for-profit to volunteers (e.g., charity fundraising and family services) are very different ballgames.

2. **What are your clients' goals, aspirations and problems**? The answers will affect what kind of content the blog should provide to address problems and offer solutions that are important to customers.



3. **What media do your clients rely on to do business**? Few business people use RSS but most know and use email frequently. If 20 percent of your clients use a new media channel such as blogs or social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing or Viadeo), that channel is a strategic opportunity for engagement with customers.[3]

4. **What words, phrases and buzzwords do clients use**? Language is key. Clients of executive recruiters talk about the hiring process a certain way and use terms others might not understand. Make sure you speak your customer's language.[4]

5. **What do clients purchase from you**? Is it a mixture of different services or products? For instance, a client may outsource jobs to you or buy advisory services from you. One interesting scenario is when a company does advisory work on something like accounting and is then asked to devise a reporting system that is legally compliant.

6. **How do clients get and what news are they interested in**? Clients who read free sheets versus paid dailies may prefer different types of news and articles.[5] Depending on

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[3] For instance, in Germany 50 percent of mid- to higher-level managers between 30 and 39 know about Xing, so a large group of these individuals will likely be members of this network (equivalent to LinkedIn). If this is your target group, being active on Xing could be very useful. See also ComMetrics.com/articles/why-social-networking-groups-fail/.

[4] For instance, as a title to our weblog we used **Social media analytics, best practice and monitoring**. An esteemed non-geek colleague who uses email, BlackBerry and VoIP suggested **Tools for benchmarking social media**.

We focus on tools that help bloggers benchmark their efforts. He thought our original title was helpful for social media experts but left the average business executive in the dark. Terms such as tools and benchmarking are used in most corporate settings and the histogram to the left of the title makes clear this site is about data. Our users wanted it to be easier for a non-geek to understand what we are about so we changed our slogan.

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these characteristics, demographics and so on, engineers will want differently prepared information via a corporate blog than lawyers or office workers.

Once management or the firm's partnership has answered these questions, it should be quite clear what effect this has upon a blog's content. Clients can then be offered relevant content that addresses issues of interest. Such work provides insights and solutions that your clients value or are very interested in. Regulation, like disclosure in advertising, labor standards and product liability or intellectual property law are just a few examples.

This process empowers you to prepare a product that serves those you want to serve. Considering the ease with which information can be accessed today, you must carefully focus your content to serve your target audience well.

Once you know how your output – or content – should look to satisfy those that must be reached, you can begin to **address how to formulate the metrics needed to benchmark and improve**.

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[5] Research has found that "readers receive a higher gratification by traditional daily newspapers in the information/orientation dimension. Free sheets deliver roughly equal gratifications on the overview/topicality and the habit/mood dimensions. The free sheets' strength lies especially in fulfilling an entertaining function…" see www.scoms.ch/current_issue/abstract.asp?id=396

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## Chapter 11: Analytics nirvana - what and why

To get a better handle on traffic, you should use an analytics program such as server-based AWStats (www.awstats.org) or web-based Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics).

Monitoring a few relatively simple metrics is the best way to start. However, all **numbers have to be considered in context**. All things considered,
- rapidly **growing traffic** means that new visitors might number around 80 percent, while returning visitors could be as low as 10 percent;

- **all that bounces is not bad,** because of
    1. **external links**: users do what they are supposed to and click these links, thereby leaving your site to find material, before usually returning later,
    2. **destination pages**: a regular reader visits a blog post, then leaves and later returns after receiving an alert for a new post,
    3. **ads**: whereby someone clicks on a banner or ad and leaves to have a look at the external site;[6]

- **targeted traffic is most important**, i.e. potential or current clients are the most critical readers you need to attract and keep satisfied.

Of course, it is necessary to study where your traffic comes from and what kind of traffic might be of most interest.

Also remember that you may find low bounce rates (40 or 50 percent) are accomplished when people are referred to the corporate blog from another blog or website. If one reads a blog post about gardening that links to another gardening site, it is likely that one will look at

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[6] Why bounce rates are not always bad: ComMetrics.com/articles/2009-week-44/

We suggest you create a custom advanced segment for Google Analytics called "Good Bounces" based on the three criteria mentioned in the metrics section of the post. A brief about how the segment was created (Elias Dabbas, Media Supermarket):

- Bounces had to be more than 0 (obviously the visitor had to bounce)

AND: any of the following should happen:

- An adsense ad had to be clicked

- OR: Advertisement had to be clicked (needs a special event action to be defined)

- OR: landing pages is one of ... (you need to define the pages which are ok for people to bounce from, like contact pages etc.)

- OR: user clicked on an external link (also needs to be defined as an event)

Of course, there might be better ways and you have to edit this based on your needs, but it works => use and edit in Google analytics.

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several pages while visiting. We find that a new reader of our or a client's blog that gets routed from another blog, is likely to read several pages before leaving.[7]

## Getting the voice of the customer

Google Analytics or AWStats are both very good at telling you
- the what,
- how many visits your blog gets,
- the bounce rate of new compared to repeat visitors, and so on.

Unfortunately, unless you ask the customer directly, how do you know whether they are satisfied with their visit or got what they came for?

For this reason it is important to survey your blog visitors to get answers to the why.

1) Why are you here? **Primary purpose.**
2) Was the visit successful? **Task completion rate.**
3) If you were not able to complete your task, why not? **Voice of the customer.**
4) Were you satisfied with your experience? **Customer satisfaction.**

By getting answers to these questions, we **move beyond the what** to the higher plane of **the why things are happening on our blog**.

The best way to find this type of information is directly from the customer. Something like **a poll exit survey**, through which your client/reader or website visitor is asked these questions as they leave your site.

Of course, getting 300 answers a month is probably plenty, so we suggest you only ask every thirtieth or hundredth visitor to fill out this exit survey. Of course, this number depends on your traffic volume.

## 3 tips for getting more targeted traffic

We start from the premise that the majority of visitors are targeted by the blog. That being the case, here are three tips:

1. **Check the relationship between percent content and percent visits**. Do blog posts of a certain category get more visitors than others? We have learned that when we blog about

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[7] This is one reason why referral traffic is so important. Those readers may want to read several pages or blog posts related to whatever they read about where they found your blog referenced (e.g., in the blog post itself and/or one of its comments). In our experience, these individuals are prime candidates for an RSS feed or email subscription for new blog content.

By contrast, visitors who find the site through organic search may spend a few seconds looking at the page they were referred to, read the information they need to solve their problem or deem the page irrelevant and quickly move on.

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brand failures or successes (e.g., Coca-Cola) or tools (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Xing), traffic increases and these stories get disproportionately high traffic.

Make sure such blog posts are of interest to your target group, who are the most important. If the answer is yes, every third blog post should address an issue that involves a famous brand or tool. Not only will it attract new visitors but, as importantly, it will also keep your current readers happy.

2. **Measure downloads**: Each blog offers some free downloads of material that is of high interest to readers, such as white papers, court rulings and so on. Measure what type of download is most popular with your readers and offer that kind of information as often as every third download.[8]

3. **Other relevant statistics**: You might be interested in comparing the bounce rate of certain sites that bring you traffic.[9] Certain blogs may bring you traffic, some of which stays to look around after reading what they originally came for; it may be worth commenting on those blogs. Linking to your own blog posts from within these comments also helps traffic. Just remember that these links must be relevant to the topic you are commenting on.

> **Common Mistake**
>
> Digg or StumbleUpon bring 'drive-by' traffic that rarely returns, but two percent might sign up for a feed via email or RSS, so please grab this traffic now.

## Mini case study

One of our clients wanted to measure 'everything' but did not know where to start. So we suggested that she first **take a baseline**, which would provide her with a picture of the blog's current standing. The baseline is a point of departure used to compare future performance improvements against.

Then she developed a benchmark using two measures
- unique visitors and
- the ComMetrics Footprint.[10]

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[8] We have learned that how-to material with a well-known brand in the title seems to get people's attention quickly and maintain its popularity, such as Nokia - White Paper - Evaluating your On-line success with Web Analytics that remains a popular item: ComMetrics.com/download/15/

[9] There are two types of bounce rates. The email bounce rate is the percentage of emails that never get to their destination. For instance, due to an invalid email address (usually bounced back to the sender) or being identified as spam, the user never sees the message.

Blog or webpage bounce rate is the percentage of visitors that read one page on the website and then leave to visit another webpage or blog post. A hundred percent bounce rate means visitors came to the page they read through a link or the RSS feed and left without looking at anything else.

[10] Read more about the ComMetrics Footprint here: HowTo.ComMetrics.com/?page_id=10

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She decided to look at the trends of these two metrics and watch any changes or improvements over a six-month period. This way, she would see if her blog's numbers improved compared to the baseline from the beginning of this benchmarking exercise.[11]

She also understood that she had to set benchmark objectives based on how she wanted these numbers to look three months later compared to her baseline. The client knew that if no benchmark was set at the start of the benchmarking period, she would not have concrete information about how the blog's improved impact over time.

During this time she also continued to stay in close contact with about 10 of her most important customers, getting their feedback regarding blog posts and content. This was the beginning of her blogging quality assurance program.

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[11] We discuss this in more detail in "#2010-05 – How it all makes your data matter" of the ComMetrics eBook series (see Chapter 21).

# Chapter 12: How often should you measure?

Chapter 11 addressed how to begin launching a blog's benchmarking program. Some highly successful CEOs argue that one should never focus on more than three measures, so they must be critical. Once assessed, actions should be taken for the subsequent quarter in order to improve further (see also Chapter 2 of the ComMetrics eBook Series – #2010-01 for more details on Key Performance Indicators).

Making sure your target audience find your blog posts relevant is also important. Just improving traffic for the sake of traffic is wasted effort. More unique visitors are nice but other than making you feel better (also called vanity metrics), they may not help you achieve your social media objectives (see also Chapter 6 of the ComMetrics eBook series – #2010-02 for more details on defining the purpose of social media activities for your organization).

Nevertheless, sensational blog post headlines may in part be responsible for this increased traffic volume. If this results in your key clients getting turned off, nothing has been accomplished. In fact, you may have caused more damage than any good achieved.[12]

## Measure regularly but not too frequently

How often should you measure metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs)? The short answer is every two weeks is probably plenty, but many want data more frequently than that. Remember that every time we check data though, it takes time away from other important activities, including writing interesting blog posts.

Because metrics should not detract from other strategic activities, the focus has to be on making it easy to
- collect necessary data, and
- calculate the metrics.

Most of your time should be spent interpreting the data to get the information needed to make decisions. Furthermore, the quality of any data collected should be such that inferences can be made and insights gained should result in actions that further improve blogging performance.

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[12] One of our clients recently started a corporate blog and chose to post something about freeriding, ski mountain touring and the danger of snow avalanches: bergfalke.com/artikel/wie-minimiere-ich-das-lawinenrisiko/. The post addressed measures to reduce the risks of getting caught in an avalanche, one of which had claimed seven lives the previous weekend, including for the first time, an air rescue doctor.

A title referring to this disaster would surely have attracted more traffic and the media would have contacted the company for a statement (e.g., did the rescuers follow best practice, could future deaths or rescue workers be avoided). However, the client wanted to avoid this given the sensitivity of the issue and worries their customers would not appreciate it, so the rather bland title stayed so as not to upset current clients.

## Watch the trends

At this stage, you should have developed relevant metrics for your organization's blog. Also, data collection should be relatively easy and mechanized to reduce the amount of resources required.

How often **should one collect benchmarking data**? Unfortunately, **that is the wrong question**. Programs might be able to measure several times each week, if not every day or hour. However, while hourly data collection is easily done, checking that data every hour takes time away from other important activities.

The **solution is to watch the trends** to deepen one's understanding. The latter will empower you to craft solutions that can be implemented to improve performance.

Comparing last month's with this month's metrics is a start, since such a trend should tell us if the traffic or the bounce rate moved in the direction we wanted. For instance, figures may indicate that efforts to reduce bounce rates are working along with increased traffic.

> Common Mistake
>
> Just because it is easy to collect a number or calculate a statistic does not necessarily make it useful.
>
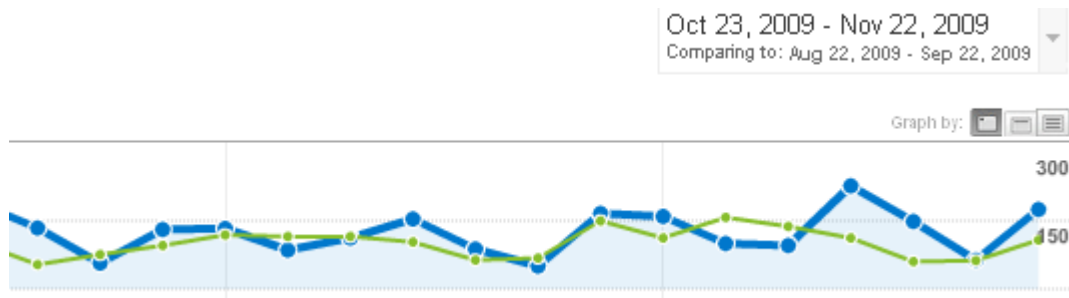> Collect data that will result in action is critical.

## Beware implementing the wrong solutions

Sometimes even comparing one month with the next is difficult. For instance, comparing June with July may bias data downward, possibly because in Sweden or Denmark, summer holidays are in full swing every July.

To take care of this, a comparison of July this year with July last year might be more fruitful. Did the bounce rate decrease, while traffic increased between July of this year compared with July of last year?

The Google Analytics graphic below shows this challenge in more detail. We compared October through November of 2009 against August through September of the same year. As the graphic shows, there is an upward traffic trend for this site, thereby indicating that things are moving in the site owner's desired direction.

But even in this trend line, the thirteenth of each month cannot be easily compared. This may be because one month it falls on a Sunday, and in another it falls on a Tuesday. Since most people are at work on Tuesdays, traffic tends to be higher on that day compared to Sunday in most countries.

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Oct 23, 2009 - Nov 22, 2009
Comparing to: Aug 22, 2009 - Sep 22, 2009

Graph by:

300

150

Assuming other variables remain constant, the above chart shows less traffic on Saturdays than on Fridays.

However, comparing unique visitors or pageviews from each of the above periods shows a substantial increase of around 25 percent. This might be of greater interest than comparing daily visitor or pageview numbers across time periods.

## 5 tips for getting a good feel of your data and metrics

Here are five ways to measure quickly and get a better feel for the trends and numbers.

1. **Check statistics every week, but no more than once a day**. If you have to check statistics or trends often, build it into your daily routine intelligently, such as doing it just before going home or during a break between major tasks. Make sure you **do not spend more than five minutes a day** checking your metrics.

2. **Watch trends**. Try not to look at daily or weekly data. While interesting, focus more on monthly, quarterly and yearly data that shows the trend line you are looking for.

3. **Establish a baseline**. Whatever you do, make sure you have the baseline – a freeze-frame picture of your blog at a specific point in time. Your project needs a baseline to measure your progress against several months down the line.

4. **Focus on three to five parameters**. If you want, you may focus on Pageviews, Unique Visitors, Bounce Rates and Total Visitors. However, sometimes fewer than five is better (e.g., Total Visitors, Email Subscribers, ComMetrics Footprint AND ComMetrics Health Check).

> Common Mistake
>
> People believe that more web analytics are better
>
> Choose three measures that mean something to your key stakeholders and focus on those and their trends.

5. **Make sure your measures are relevant to stakeholders**. Regardless which measures and how many you use (see point 4), they need to make sense to your stakeholders, such as top management and the budget committee.
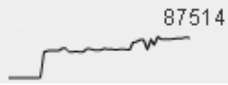
## Mini case study

In one instance a client wanted several metrics to be measured regularly. We defined the metrics with the client's team and agreed what to measure regularly. However, we also

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concluded that data would only be shared after eight weeks, since this would enable discussion of trends instead of focusing on daily or hourly spikes in traffic.

We started by taking a baseline and started tracking trends from point forward. After eight weeks we showed the customer the trend line. While the blog exceeded two key measures and their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), it failed on one. The team took action that yielded significant improvements during the subsequent quarter, also ensuring that the third KPI would be met.

Incidentally, top management had heard about Google Pagerank and wanted to make sure this tool would be used.[13]

**ComMetrics Footprint Components**

| | All-time trend of individual components | % Baseline quarter with last quarter | % Baseline month with last month | % Year-over-Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| G | 7 | 72.73% | 100% | 85.71% |
| Y | 87514 | 834.09% | 363.99% | 193.75% |
| G | 7284 | 6528.64% | 6952.75% | 3594.3% |

2010-02-13 - Gordon Brown - Uk Prime Minister - do the trends go in the right direction?

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[13] Since this is included in the ComMetrics Footprint (see above, LINK HERE), management allowed the team not to report the measure separately from the ComMetrics Footprint, a composite measure.

# Chapter 13: Applying best practice with SMART metrics

In Chapter 3 of "#2010-01 – Why benchmark social media?" we pointed out that **operating metrics are the company's health indicators**. Focus on the right ones like blood pressure and weight, measure them regularly, and **if your operating metrics and KPIs are out of whack, do something before your company has a heart attack**.

Therefore, measures have to be clarified and KPIs must be aligned with the corporate strategy. For instance, improving annual sales or reducing advertising costs may set the tone for what you go after with social media, such as helping sales efforts or supporting cost-cutting efforts.

KPIs should be made up of metrics that are
- **Specific** (how much),
- **Manageable** (follow the **KISS**[14] principle or Keep It Simple, Stupid),
- **Actionable** (under-performance results in action),
- **Relevant** (i.e. linked to strategic objectives), and
- **Trending** (e.g., comparing Q1 of 2009 with Q1 of 2010).

Only then will the KPIs you design be comprehensive enough to make up the **SMART**[15] acronym.

> Common Mistake
>
> Setting objectives that miss one key ingredient, such as specificity, manageability, actionable, relevance or trending.
>
> People can easily manage making themselves look good by achieving these objectives.
>
> For instance, if you want traffic growth you must address how much is good enough and why before starting to benchmark.

In practice this means that measuring things that are relevant to your KPIs require addressing several points.

1. **What objectives** need to be accomplished? Spell it out!
2. **What quantity** is expected? For example, how many unique visitors is enough?
3. **What time-frame** will be looked at? For example, comparing Q1 with Q2.
4. **What quality** level represents acceptable performance? Define quality, please![16]
5. **What kind of budget** are we talking about? For example, human resources, time and money.

## Combining the right metrics with best practice

We are often asked about whether these performance targets can just be made up. Sometimes clients indicate that they would prefer following a standard.

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[14] More about KISS: HowTo.ComMetrics.com/?page_id=132

[15] More about SMART: HowTo.ComMetrics.com/?page_id=104

[16] For instance, you may get 1,000 unique visitors at an email sign-up page for blog posts. Is it enough if 10 actually sign up? If this is acceptable, it must be defined beforehand. This gets people to focus on the target and what needs to be done to achieve this goal.

A standard can be an industry-wide framework, whereby a regulator has set up some rules that must be followed to be in accordance with good practice. For instance, restaurants follow good practice regarding hygiene and food storage.

In the context of blog or social media metrics, the focus should be on best practice and not a standard.[17] Best practice usually applies to an industry in which companies have agreed to certain practices that are considered best. Examples could be customer service, customer returns (e.g., does the customer need a receipt to return a purchase for cash or in-store credit?). What is considered best practice may differ depending on the industry and where it is.

So if we have agreed on what is best practice and that we should follow it in blog metrics, how do we proceed? In social media even best practices are a rare breed, but this is part of being innovative. Not everything is already known and a few strategies have yet to be explored.

Put differently, if most have blazed a particular trail, best practices have certainly been developed. Unfortunately, this also means that those who are just starting out, whether in social media use or something else, are laggards who need to catch up. Even if best practices are not well developed, this does not stop your organization from putting some in place, based on your own intelligence work.

## Ownership of metrics

For each metric, you would ideally assign an owner who is accountable for its performance. In a larger company there might be a staff responsible for web analytics.

There are two things to consider.
1. It may take some specialized knowledge about metrics or web analytics to monitor them (e.g., which plugins to install and how to leverage blog content with other channels such as Facebook and Twitter).
2. Blog authors must follow through by regularly posting good content, while using the tools or plugins provided by tweeting about new blog content and writing on the company's Facebook wall.

> **Common Mistake**
>
> Assigning ownership of a metric only to one 'expert'. It is **better** to assign ownership to those posting to the blog **and** the metric expert.

In some companies we sometimes hear, "**No one person is responsible for sales, we are all in sales and therefore responsible**." A similar saying applies to social media and metrics. We need to leverage our skill base by making the best use of our tools, while leveraging customer engagement as effectively as possible.

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[17] There are few standards in social media, however the full disclosure standard applies for celebrity endorsements as well as product reviews by bloggers in the US, as outlined by the US Federal Trade commission: ComMetrics.com/articles/sheer-transparency/

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In many cases a practical approach is having a team responsible for metrics that includes technical expertise as well as bloggers, users and so forth. To illustrate, it could be that regular blog posts of a certain type are needed to get new customers to sign up for a service. However, unless the bloggers commit to regularly providing such content, the blog is unlikely to achieve this objective (this is also discussed in more detail in the next chapter – Chapter 14).

> **Common Mistake**
>
> Waiting until you are completely done preparing your blog before discussing what metrics will be used to measure performance – that should happen simultaneously.

## Which competitor keeps your boss awake at night?

There are numerous ways to benchmark and against any number of blogs. But usually whatever company keeps your CEO up at night is the first or second candidate for used in benchmarking.

So if they worry about competitor X, it is good strategy to compare your blog against that company's blog or webpage. However, tracking an underdog as well as those who do better or are a bit larger is also useful and helpful. Besides benchmarking against the above companies, one should also try benchmarking against something like an industry standard. Accordingly, benchmarking yourself against about six blogs is a good start.

The FT ComMetrics Blog Index (FTindex.ComMetrics.com) is the industry standard for ranking corporate blogs of FT Global 500 and Fortune 500 companies and allows you to benchmark a group of blogs against this standard.

An example would be comparing your corporate blog against the top 10 rankings in the FT ComMetrics Blog Index, as well as the average of the FT ComMetrics Blog Index. This provides a trend over a year or longer to indicate how these blogs have improved and, most importantly, how your blog is doing in comparison.

## 3 tips for benchmarking your blog

1. **Choose a smaller comparison set that makes sense.** Choose three blogs by competitors to benchmark against by using one underdog, one average, and one trail blazer (a blog that does better than yours or you consider very good – best practice).

**Why:** Remember you don't need too much data, you just need to find out where you stand compared to companies in your business.

2. **Benchmark against a topic standard.** Take the average of a set of blogs from a standard, such as the average of the top 10 blogs in the same category as yours, meaning blog content focusing on the same topics as your own. If your blog deals with food and wine compare it with at least two others from this category.[18]

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[18] When you register a blog with My.ComMetrics.com, you assign it to a category (e.g., public relations, Fortune 500). In return, you get two ComMetrics Footprint measures.

3. **Taking a standard measure.** To get a better feel for how the largest companies do it in your country, take one or two of those included in an industry standard, such as the FT ComMetrics Blog Index.

**Why:** As a small company you have limited resources and must use them efficiently to get the biggest bang for your buck. Comparing yourself to the big leagues can help further fine-tune your social media marketing efforts. You don't need to beat the best but they set the bar high for the pole jump.

1. Your blog's Footprint within its category (i.e. comparing apples with apples).

2. A Footprint comparing your blog with all other blogs in our database (a sort of ComMetrics universe).
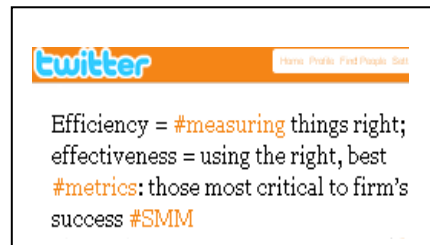
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## Mini case study

An esteemed fellow blogger recently wrote this comment:

*"Can ComMetrics really claim to measure the effectiveness of corporate blogs, especially without page views or bounce rates?"[19]*

The effectiveness of a blog is neither pageviews nor bounce rates recorded for various blog destinations.

As outlined in Chapter 12, not all bounce rates are bad, since they include regular visitors who come read what they want and leave right afterwards. Also, page views by visitors you do not consider relevant do little to help your bottom line.



The effectiveness of your blog is influenced by the KPIs you formulate and what metrics you decide to use. While you may use bounce rates as provided through various packages, My.ComMetrics focuses on measures not covered by Google Analytics, Radian or Omnitures, among others.

Whatever is needed, establish the baseline and then start improving while doing the best you can with the limited resources available to you. We provide you with a straightforward dashboard for straightforward answers.

Remember, if 10 people read your blog post and each one of them purchases €1 million worth of goods next month, this may be what you need. In that case you will not care much whether each one of these people had a bounce rate of 100 percent or each one looked only at one page.

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[19] As stated by Frank Harkin here: www.the-group.net/blog/index.asp?blogid=208

# Chapter 14: Who is accountable for SMART metrics

Whatever benchmarks are used for a corporate blog or any social media activity, they must make sense to top management or c-suite people (e.g., CEO, COO). Unless the measures are meaningful to these stakeholders, you are unlikely to get their attention and even less likely to get their support for your corporate blog venture.

At the end of the day the question of who is responsible for monitoring and reaching SMART metrics implemented for your social media efforts remains.

## Being social means creating the right work environment

Maybe a better question is, "Who is **not** responsible, since we are all responsible for reaching these goals and KPIs?" We are all accountable to some degree because all employees contribute to the company's social media efforts in one way or another.[20]

To illustrate, Steve Rubel from Edelmann gave an interview in December 2009 in which he pointed out that about 1000 of Edelmann's employees are active on Twitter and 2000 on Facebook.[21] These employees can tweet and re-tweet, and share corporate information on their Facebook walls. Edelmann shows how this can help information go viral when it releases its trust barometer every year at the start of WEF Davos in late January.[22]

Similar to Edelmann's example, imagine five of your 35 employees tweet about your latest corporate blog post. Maybe two even write an insightful comment about this post on the corporate blog, which gets one or two clients to write their own comment. Of course, this kind of scenario happens regularly with much larger companies, such as on the Daimler blog blog.daimler.com.

This illustrates how getting workers engaged with the company also means allowing them to use these tools. Of course, it must be based on a sensible social media policy that fits on a napkin.[23]

Our policy makes it clear that social media should be used wisely and cannot interfere with other tasks. But asking employees to use social media smartly also requires that they be part of the metrics and your benchmarking exercise.

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[20] For instance, a trainee may not write for the blog, but they may refer and link to the blog or a particular comment on it from their private Facebook account.

[21] Read more about the interview (in German, including an English video) here: bernetblog.ch/2010/01/26/pr-2-0-facebook-und-twitter-zahlen-zum-handwerk/

[22] Just imagine 1000 employees tweeting a link about the Edelman Trust Barometer report. They each average 300 followers, of which six percent click the link, with another one percent, some of them very influential, re-tweeting (i.e. resending the Edelmann employee's tweet) it. The rest is history… Thousands of people, if not millions, will hear about the company's work. Search results here: search.twitter.com/search?q=%23edelman+%23trust.

[23] Get such a policy here: info.cytrap.eu/terms-privacy/sm-policy

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## Metrics involve us all

For metrics and benchmarking this means that employees have to set targets regarding their social media activities as well. While three tweets a day during working hours may be okay, more might be too much.

Similarly, if employees, including those writing your blog posts, are part of the metrics team, solutions are more likely to be supported and, most importantly, reached faster. Instead of "pointing fingers" and/or "passing the buck", it is time for everyone involved to "get a check-up from the neck up" and help identify solutions.

You are either **part of the problem or, hopefully, part of the solution**.

All too often we spend more time trying to define "who is responsible" or, who should "own" that metric than identifying solutions to the actual problem. If the goal of the corporate blog is to "produce" new leads that can result in additional sales, then everyone should work together toward that goal.

If the company fails to reach its social media objectives or the number of comments it wishes to see for each blog post, you need to figure out why. For instance, did employees tweet about the blog post? Did the author of the blog post maybe make the effort to ask a client to comment? Sometimes we have to go the extra mile to get the results we need.

Most importantly, one must come up with a solution to resolve the problem. The latter must be implemented and tested in the next Quarter to see whether it worked or failed to **solve the challenge**.

People promising to post on the blog and then failing to come through could be a concern. But one must address the reason for the failure to perform and then come up with a solution. The obstacles and difficulties that prevent people from coming through on their promises need to be identified and removed. Sometimes it a deadline given a week before the blog post goes out is required, as well as a reminder of that deadline two weeks beforehand. Other times more actions are required.

Hence, it is not about who "owns" these metrics. **Several people need to take ownership and come forward with tangible, actionable solutions to help improve performance**. While all of us are responsible for achieving the metrics and enacting actionable strategies to make it happen, in practice, not committees but a few key people take responsibility.

While the group should understand your KPIs and support them, some key people have to take responsibility and champion the cause. So a team of three people might have to commit to writing at least one blog post each month to be submitted by a certain deadline.

Whatever metrics the company decides to use, the blogger should in part be accountable for the metric. In other words, unless the blogger commits to the objectives set for increasing engagement or reach, the blog is unlikely to achieve them.

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# 4 tips for getting ready with a blog's performance objectives

1. **Agree on and define your target audience**. Once again, you have to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Are we trying to attract consumers, industrial buyers or legislators?

**Why:** Remember, **all you need is an audience of about 1000 who are listening** (i.e. reading your blog posts), but they have to be the right 1000 people. A good benchmark is for about 30 percent of those 1000 people to be current clients and another 500 to be potential clients you are interested in cultivating.

2. **How does the client want to be kept informed**? Find out if your clients will be interested in subscribing to your blog's content via email and/or RSS (Real Simple Syndication). Do a formal or informal pre-launch survey and/or talk to them about the blog and encourage them to sign up.

**Why:** Having **five important clients** read your blog and responding by commenting or talking to you on the phone about content may be all it takes to justify this project's launch and continuation.

3. **Set out some topics that could be of interest to clients.** Because people are inundated with information these days, focus on information that helps your clients work better, such as discussing and explaining new trends, regulations and products in the industry.

**Why:** Clients will be more interested in carefully monitoring their email inbox if the content **helps them with their own work** by providing relevant tips, insights and intelligence that they can use.

4. **Agree who will do what, when and how**. Agree who will post about what kind of issue and how often (e.g., every second work day each week). Agreement must be such that people have committed to delivering quality content on time.

**Why:** It is always easy to say yes, but so much harder to deliver before the deadline and **unless people deliver as promised, the venture will have difficulty thriving**.

## Mini case study

Our biggest challenge for our blog at ComMetrics.com has been keeping in mind that our primary readership and clients are interested in blog posts that address trends, tools and benchmarks in the social media domain.

Whenever we stray from this focus by posting blog content addressing such important issues as the financial crisis, global warming or the WEF Davos meeting, our readers' response goes down. Yes, traffic may have been okay for these posts but our target audience, including current clients, did not care that much.

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This 'mistake' on our part resulted in fewer relevant visitors (i.e. current and potential clients) reading those posts and less conversation with our readers (this is blogspeak and means **fewer people left a comment adding more insights to such a post**).

We were also surprised that while a new blog was recently launched at Bergfalke.com, some of their clients had no clue how to sign up to get blog posts via email. Of course, we helped find a solution (preparing a video to walk people through the sign-up process). It had nothing to do with them being uninitiated in the Web but they had little understanding about weblogs and, as importantly, did not want to admit that. However, releasing the video removed a big obstacle for these individuals and sign-up numbers increased soon after.

# Chapter 15: Conclusion

Managers understand budget overruns and will take necessary actions. They must understand blogging benchmarks in order to decide what actions are needed depending on achieved objectives.

Chapters 11 through 14 outlined what issues must be addressed regarding SMART metrics and getting people to commit to long-term trends. Whatever metrics one decides to collect, the key here is to be able to make of these numbers by answering three questions.

1. **Why** did the improvements, such as lower bounce rate or higher traffic, happen? For instance, was it pure luck or did Martha Stewart tweet about it? Was the subsequent traffic 'a good thing' (potential customers)?
2. **What** solutions could we craft to further improve performance, as measured by the metrics we are interested in?
3. **How** can these solutions for further performance improvement be implemented most effectively using the least amount of resources?

Sadly, we tend to have too much, and often the wrong, data. The same happens in web analytics, where we have mountains of data but they do not provide the insights we need to improve performance.

Nevertheless, needing to know tangible business outcomes of blogging is a common business need.

1. What are we getting for the money we spend on our blogger program and social media initiatives?
2. What impact is it having on our customers?
3. How is it helping us make more money, reduce our expenses, etc.?

Today's best practice corporate bloggers actively work to tie their blog to business outcomes, by setting goals and objectives for their blog project(s), as well as establishing
- initial baseline measurements for projects based on the areas they are trying to improve (e.g. customer retention, customer referrals, etc.), and
- regularly measuring and monitoring their progress.

Armed with these baseline numbers, they are able to keep track of the impact of their blogging efforts on their business, and what, if any, course corrections are still needed to ensure that they achieve their goals and objectives.

This information also enables them to assist their company to make smarter decisions about where to spend their company's time, resources and money on future social media initiatives to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Finally, in conjunction with tying their blog program to business outcomes, successful social media evangelists, managers or experts make sure to communicate that data to their company's executive team and colleagues.

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## About ComMetrics

ComMetrics, a division of CyTRAP Labs GmbH, is an industry leader in the analysis of corporate blogs in Europe, creating web-based software used by social media experts, in-house professionals and advertising agencies helping companies improve social media performance in the blogosphere.

As an independent consulting body, we have been monitoring best practice since its inception at the turn of the 21st century and advise corporations, non-profits and governmental organizations on their social media presence. For these tasks we have developed a range of web-based software tools, some of which are offered for public use. These are available at My.ComMetrics.com.

To find out more about ComMetrics' products and services, please contact us at www.ComMetrics.com.