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Is Your Audience Who You Think They Are?

Most of us have had this experience:

You're walking down the street or through a crowded restaurant, bar, what have you—and you get a glance of someone you used to know. You haven't seen them in quite awhile but you're certain it's them. You get excited. What a great surprise. You rush up to close the distance between you, tap them on the shoulder, expecting a hearty hello. They turn around, look you in the face, and it's….actually not them at all. Not even close. **All you get is a blank stare.**

Embarrassed, you stammer some apologies and slink back to whatever you were doing before. They shrug and go back to their business. Later, you wonder why you felt so certain it was them when it clearly wasn't. Who knows? Maybe their posture, hair, clothing, something about them transmitted a powerful feeling and you, as so many of us do, mistook that feeling for fact.

Many websites don't recognize their true audience

What does all this have to do with publishing a website and building an audience? Well, consider this. Thousands of people start websites every year. Whether it's to sell a product, market a service, create a publication on a particular topic, gather a community around a hobby, or get their opinions out there. So much energy goes into creating and maintaining these sites, there's often little time to do audience research.

> *Most site owners, driven by a passion for their ideas, operate on instinct. They're sure they know exactly who they've created their sites for and who will find them appealing.*

But, like the common case of mistaken identity described above, there's a lot of tricks the world can play on your mind. In fact, it's quite easy to fixate on a target you're not actually hitting. That's why it's so important to have deep, accurate customer analytics on your site. Going out of your way to conduct rigorous audience measurement means that you can guard against misperception.

Audience analytics can help you see more clearly

To make this all more concrete, let's look at a scenario:

Say you're a fledgling clothing designer. Your focus is on making breathable, form-fitting athletic/wilderness gear. To you, your apparel is for men who love running, hiking, rock climbing, and other outdoor adventures. So you've created a site to market and sell your gear that's designed accordingly—including masculine colors, terse and somewhat technical product descriptions, minimal use of models to display the clothing, etc. These are design elements you believe will appeal to men.

However, when you start tracking your sales you notice something odd. You're selling mostly the smallest sizes of your clothing. A lot of your larger sized pieces are staying on the shelf. **Since you made sure to have good web analytics on your site, you go to your analytics dashboard to verify your audience data.** Lo and behold, you discover that a huge portion of your website traffic and purchasing audience is women.

It appears they like the clothing so much that, even though it's not designed for them, they're making the men's sizes workable by scooping up the smaller sizes. Wow. You immediately imagine what your sales could be if you designed your site, not to mention more of your clothing, for women.

Your business benefits when you learn and respond

Based on the demographic information revealed by your ecommerce analytics, you make the pivot and focus more of your efforts on appealing to active and outdoorsy women. **Within 6 months, your sales jump 50% and local retail stores become much more receptive to stocking your gear.**

This is one real-world example of how analytics can help a website publisher understand their audience at a deeper level—and respond in ways that improve their business performance. Imagine what you could be learning about your audience, and what you might do to make your site a "must-visit" place for them.

Who Is Quantcast?

Quantcast is a digital advertising company that specializes in audience measurement and the delivery of digital advertising. As the pioneer of direct measurement in 2006, Quantcast now has the most in-depth understanding of audiences across the desktop and mobile web. We help marketers and publishers make the smartest choices as they seek to grow their audiences and buy and sell the most effective targeted advertising on the market.

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