

Are All Web Site Statistics Reports Created Equal?

A Technology Brief From Net Applications



**LOG ANALYZER VS.
REAL-TIME STATS**

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How The Different Technologies Work

page 2/3



Introduction

Are all web site statistical reports created equal? Log analyzers and real-time statistics analysis tools report and track site activity in very different ways. As a result, they collect different information and may not always provide the same business intelligence. For example, real-time stats are much better at tracking unique visitors and give a much more accurate page view count.

Gaining a greater understanding of how these systems track and report stats will help you better reconcile the difference between the two techniques. Also, by understanding the differences you will be in a better position to interpret the results and make more effective decisions regarding your business and marketing initiatives.

Log File Analyzer

A web server creates a record of the traffic and information requests in log files. These log files include information on errors, processing time, bandwidth used, visitor IP address, where visitors came from (referred) along with additional information such as operating system or browser used.

Web site statistics that use log data typically install on a server behind your firewall and read your log files on a periodic basis. They interpret the data and provide a snapshot report in a readable format of the information contained in your log file.

Real-Time Statistics

Another method of analyzing your Web site activity is to update an optimized reporting database each time a visitor comes to your site. This method requires you to place a small JavaScript on every web page that is to be tracked. This code is invisible to your site visitors. As visitors surf your site, the code places a cookie on their computer so they have a unique identifier and can be tracked.

Within seconds of placing the JavaScript on the Web pages to be tracked, site visitor information is securely written out to a database and is instantly available for reporting. Once the data is captured, the optimized database engine aggregates and manipulates the data to report on areas such as what marketing campaign referred the visitor to your site or such data as order values. Because the data is real-time, you do not have to wait for a snapshot report.

LOG ANALYZER VS. REAL-TIME STATS



Take Advantage Of Real-Time Statistics Now

Why Log File Analyzers and Real-Time Statistics May Produce Different Results

With real-time stats, as visitors surf your site, the code places a cookie on their computer so they are tracked as unique ...

Issue Log	Log Analyzer	Real-Stats
Counting Method	Counts hits from the Web server - log unique by IP address only	Counts visitor (unique by cookie and IP address) and page views
Reporting Method	Periodic processing and extraction from log file	Available real-time from any browser
Crawlers/Spiders	Tracked via hits	May not be counted if HTML is not viewed
Proxy Server Page	Cached pages not counted	All pages counted
Non HTML files	Non HTML files such as graphics and downloads may be counted as page views	Unless specifically tracked will not be double counted
Error Pages	Tracked in separate tables of log file	Only counted if JavaScript is able to execute
Redirects	Requires special configuration to track	Automatically tracks the first page viewed

How To Reconcile The Results From A Log Analyzer To Real-Time Stats Reports

If you have significant differences between your real-time statistics and your log analyzer, you may want to use the following check list to ensure you are getting the best quality of information.

- **Verify that all of you web pages you want tracked include the tracking script.** Many webmasters place the java tracking script in a common "header" or "footer" area of their Web site. By including the script in a common area, it is referenced on all pages of your web site. If the script is not included in the page, the page will not be tracked.

- **Verify any site activity that may be non-HTML related such as display of graphics or downloads.** A log analyzer will track this activity as hits. Your real-time statistics tool will only track these if there are associated eb pages that include the java tracking script.

- **Remaining differences may be caused by the following: Solid Support:**

- a. User sessions from a log analyzer are tracked by IP address vs. a unique cookie used or tracking by a real-time statistics product. As a result, a returning visitor with a refreshed IP address may be tracked as a new user by the log analyzer vs. a returning user based on their cookie. (Note: if your visitor does not accept cookies they will be tracked by their IP address).

- b. Partially loaded pages, error pages or those pages stopped by the visitor may not get tracked by the real-time stats package.

About Net Applications

Since 1999, Net Applications has been a leading source of website analytics for webmasters and eMarketers. Headquartered in Aliso Viejo, California, and with operations in California, Nevada and Michigan, Net Applications distributes its services through over 8,000 partners and affiliates worldwide. For more information, e-mail us at: support@netapplications.com or visit our Web site at www.netapplications.com.

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