

## How to outsmart your competitors on the Internet.

*Are your competitors getting ahead of you on the Internet?*

*Are your website statistics fooling you?*

This whitepaper reviews the key factors for both a successful website and an effective Internet Marketing Campaign and then adds a new essential ingredient.

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## Executive Summary.

The Internet has become part of everyday business and personal life and traffic increases worldwide every day. It provides an unsurpassed opportunity for businesses to access new markets and grow their existing markets locally, nationally and globally. There are many challenges to be addressed in ensuring a website is visible and effective. Key amongst these is ensuring that you can measure the effectiveness of your site both in comparison to how it performed last month and last year and how it is performing against your competitors. Your Internet presence is more than just a website and needs to react and evolve to meet competitive and market changes. In many ways the dynamics of business on the internet are similar to those of stock markets. Some market niches are extremely competitive, whilst others are currently less competitive or underdeveloped. The latter allow you to gain advantage over your less internet savvy competitors. If you are involved in the former then you need as much market intelligence and possible to plan and adapt your campaigns and your responses to theirs.

This whitepaper describes a method of determining how well your current website is performing and how to assess this against the standard for your market sector. This “benchmarking” allows you to adjust your website content for more relevance, to decide where and how to spend your marketing budget on activities to boost your website and to make these decisions based on factual managerial reports to achieve a good Return on Investment (ROI).

## Ingredients for successful Internet Marketing.

There are key ingredients to any Internet Marketing Campaign that when applied correctly generate a successful website. First is deciding the business objectives of the site; next is building the site with the correct technologies so it can be indexed easily by search engines. The site must be attractive to visitors and must be easily navigable. The time you get to get the attention of visitors drops progressively each year. Nowadays visitors expect to be able to find the information, product, or service they are searching quickly on your site otherwise they click away. Thus good site design is imperative to improve your conversion ratio of visitors to customers or clients.

The balance between good visual design and good design for search engines is often difficult to achieve and when you find a company that understands this and has the skills to deliver it for your site then you will notice the impact on your site rankings and conversions and on your sites ROI.

*“Not all visitors are good visitors”.*

An Internet Marketing Campaign needs to be targeted at bringing the correct visitors to your site. These are the ones that are looking for your service or products. Whether you use Paid Internet Advertising (Pay Per Click / Pay Per Call) or rely on your natural / organic placement to direct surfers to your site, the key is promoting yourself on the correct keyphrases. Some may be obvious but a good Internet Marketing supplier will research your market and advise on others important relevant keyphrases and on a range of ways of driving the correct visitors to your site.

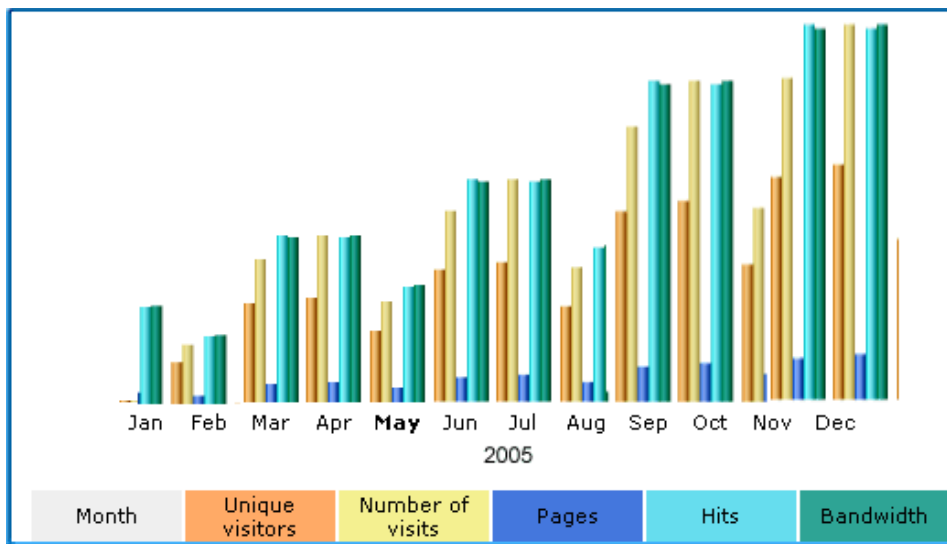
## Measuring Performance.

Many organisations monitor the performance already by using analyses generated from their website logs, from search engine positional analysis tools (reporting their rankings) or from services provided by the Search Engine companies themselves e.g. Google Analytics, Google Adwords reports and Yahoo/Overture PPC reports.

These tools allow you to see how your internet presence/website is performing. This view is somewhat in isolation and therefore needs to be put into context. In business terms it is even more important to obtain an objective view on how your website is performing against the competition is essential.

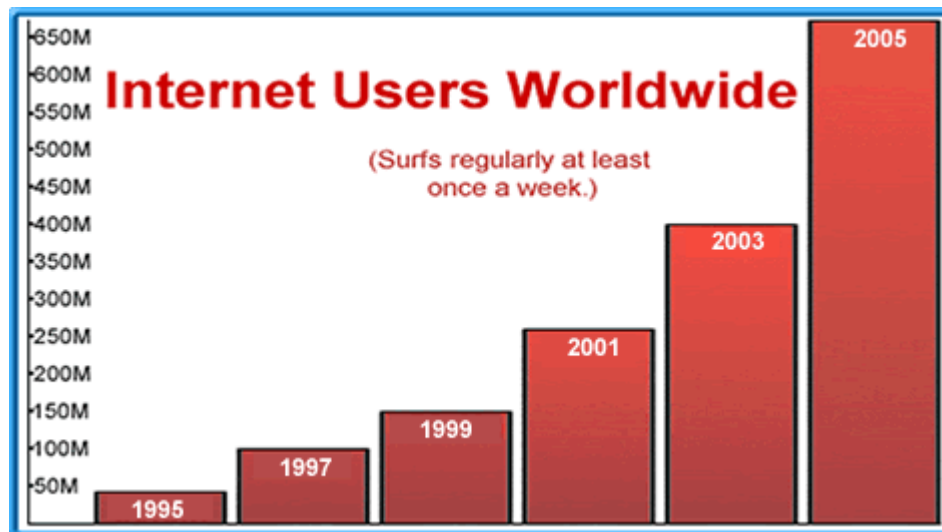
## The myth of ever improving statistics.

If you are one of the relatively few site-owners who actually monitor their own website traffic, you may be encouraged by what you see. Does it look something like this:



- i.e.
- **greater** numbers of hits
  - **growing** counts of user sessions
  - **increasing** referrals
  - **etc.**

In truth, as the following chart shows, given the growth in internet usage, you might be fairly hard pressed to find a website that wasn't replicating those trends:



What you really need to know is;

**‘how is your website performing in comparison with other websites in your competitive space?’**

If that impressive graph of hits showing 10% growth year on year, actually compares with 15% for your competitors, it’s suddenly not quite as good as it looks!

## The need to benchmark against Key Performance Indicators.

You need a way to measure whether your site is not achieving to the level it could and should. That’s where a **Performance Monitoring** becomes essential. You can see how you measure up against the average for your market sector and how to improve, either to reach the average or surpass the best and hence get ahead of your competitors. By measuring against a range of Key Performance Indicators it is possible to compare your website’s performance against a basket of your competitors’ sites and monitor that performance on a monthly basis. Thus you can to establish objectively if your strategies are working via a clear effective management report.

### How a Performance Monitoring works.

A website’s ranking (i.e. how well it is Search Engine Optimised) depends on a number of factors which can be summarised as

- **Content**
- **Keywords**
- **Links**

The importance of each depends on the market or industry in which the website competes. Different Search Engines and Internet Directories give different weightings to each of these criteria.

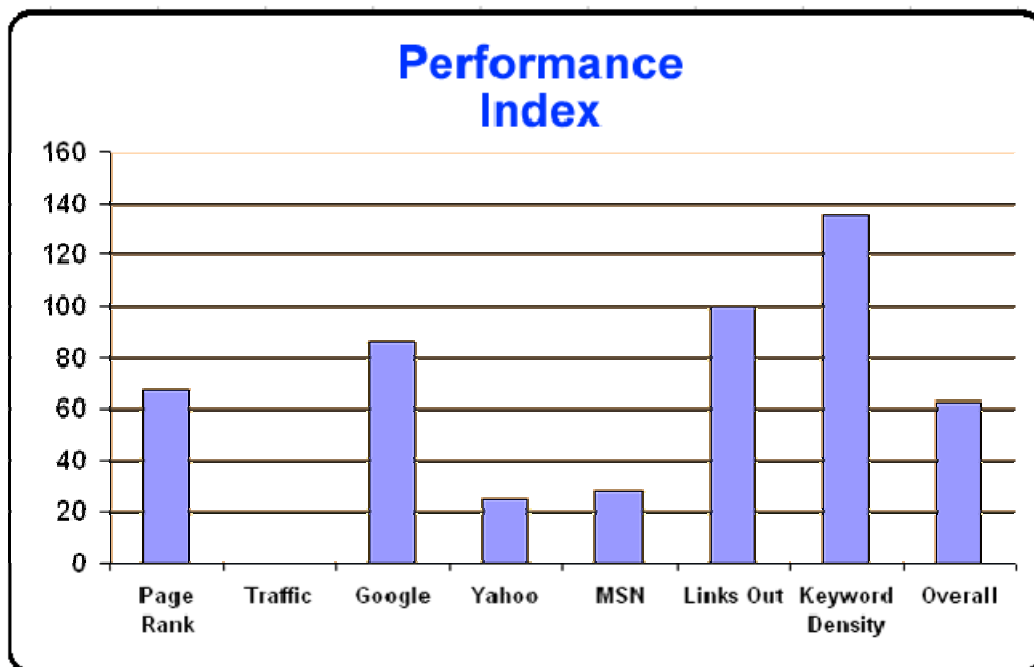
*NB: A trend led by Google is to assess the importance of your site to your market sector (relevance) and assign your ranking accordingly. Google nowadays weights incoming relevant links more highly than keywords or phrases embedded in the meta-tags hidden in the code of your web pages.*

## Gathering Key information.

Using a number of industry specific Key Performance Indicators in each of these three categories, it is possible to establish benchmarks against which website performance and progress can be monitored.

The process:

1. Analyse current performance to establish a starting point i.e. **‘where are we now’**
2. Analyse a basket of competitors websites, aggregate the data, and establish the benchmarks against a number of keywords and keyword phrases, ensuring that the weighting of each aspect is appropriate to the industry being analysed.



The chart above provides an overview of the website performance indexed against an aggregate of number of competitive sites on the basis of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). *N.B: An index of 100 means that the site is performing at the average level of the sector.*

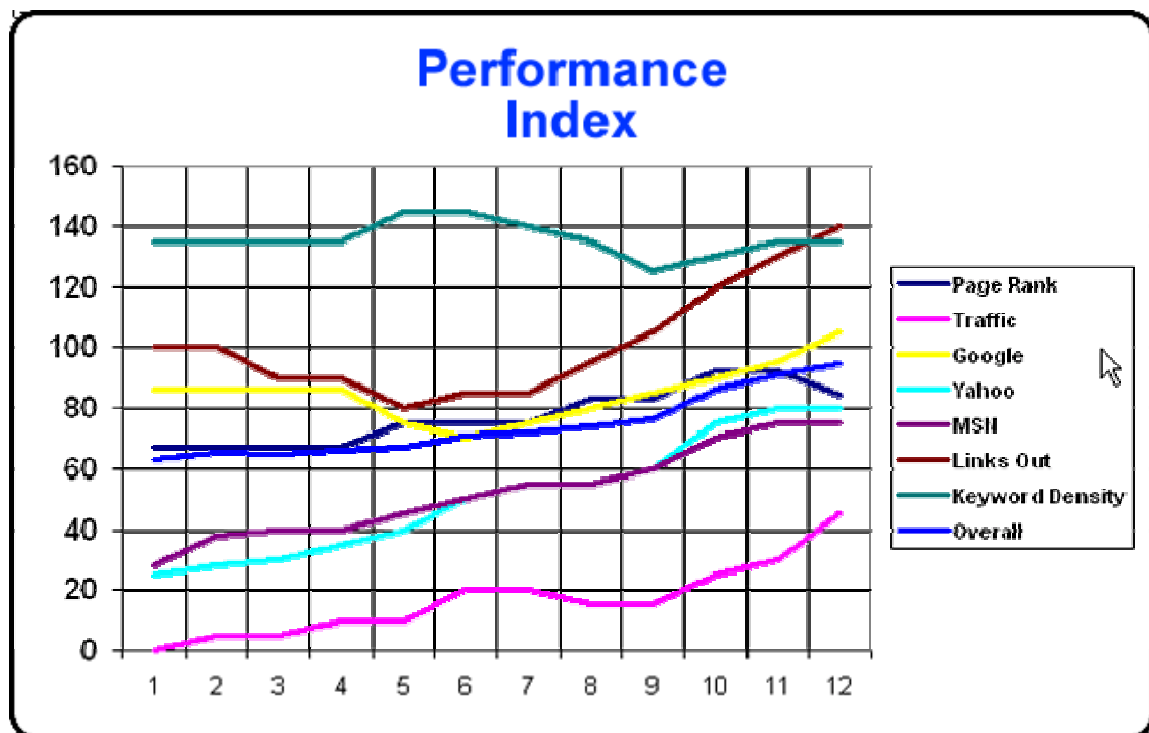
These KPI's measure elements which are crucial to Search Engine Optimisation (i.e. the criteria that Search Engines use to decide a website's listing, and rank within that listing):

- **Page Rank** is Google's own measure of Page Effectiveness.
- **Traffic** measures the website's visitors
- **Google, Yahoo, MSN** show the links in from those Search Engines
- **Links Out** to other websites
- **Overall** is an average of all the above, weighted according to their importance in this particular industry

In the above example, the subject site does not even register for traffic measurement against its competitors, and on several other KPI's it is well below par. The exercise provides valuable data on how performance can and should be improved.

### Regular monitoring.

The sites and the benchmark criteria should be monitored regularly to provide management reports on at least a monthly basis.



*This chart shows the tracking of the KPI's over a one year period and shows how this particular site is improving its performance in some areas, but may require attention in others.*

It is important to remember that the Index is a constant reflection, not only of our subject website's performance, but also the competitors as well. Assessing progress in isolation is of little value. Monitoring traffic growth figures without putting them in a competitive context can be downright misleading.

It is important to measure your sites performance against your market sector and against your competition otherwise whilst you are being carried on "by the tide" you may miss the fact that your site is underperforming leaving you way behind as your competitors swim strongly ahead.

### Summary

The Internet is increasingly a key factor to an organisations success. More business is moving online hence it is increasingly important to understand the key ingredients to ensuring that your internet presence (i.e. your evolving website) delivers real business benefits, a ROI and helps to drive your business profits.

To many the Internet is now more than a phenomenon and has become another route to market. Many businesses have been created “online only” and are very successful. Even some of these could be more successful by applying the key ingredients for successful Internet Marketing discussed in this whitepaper.

It is important to partner with a supplier who understands all these aspects and delivers the relevant skills and knowledge to make your website visible, readable and successful.

In particular this whitepaper has described how you should consider benchmarking your current website performance against your historic performance, against your market average and against key competitors. To facilitate this we discussed how Performance Monitoring Index (available as a service from your local WSI Consultant) provides you with clear, easily understandable reports that allow you to focus where you need to improve your website and associated marketing.

**Contact Peter Connolly on 01526 345599**

## About WSI

### WSI – “we simplify the Internet”

With our headquarters based in Toronto, Canada, WSI has been developing profitable Internet Solutions since the mid 1990s. Our network of certified Internet Consultants and Marketing Specialists is the largest of its kind and we’re ranked the #1 Internet Services Franchise in the world by industry-leading *Entrepreneur* magazine.

WSI is committed to improving the profitability of our customers through the use of leading-edge Internet technologies, delivered by knowledgeable and service-oriented **Internet Marketing Consultants**. As more businesses realize the importance of the Internet to their continued success and growth, WSI is ready to serve their needs with affordable Internet Marketing solutions.

In support of our mission, WSI holds memberships with the Canadian Marketing Association and SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization). These industry associations give our Internet Marketing Consultants access to cutting-edge training and resources and share in our belief of following responsible marketing practices. When you work with WSI you can be sure you’re working with true SEO (Search Engine Optimization) industry professionals.

Thanks to the trust and support of our customers over the years, our network has grown to over 1,500 Internet and Marketing Consultants serving small- to medium-sized businesses in 87 countries worldwide.