Bowen Craggs & Co

Online effectiveness experts

Measuring what matters in digital corporate communications:

Global best practice in analytics, visitor surveys and key performance indicators

How to customise and benchmark your analytics to have more informed conversations with your internal stakeholders

Best practice in visitor surveys – identifying who people are, why they visit and whether they got what they came for

Case study: Delivering continuous improvement with the 'Insights Hub' at pharmaceutical giant GSK

Updated January 2017 **(First published Nov 2016)**

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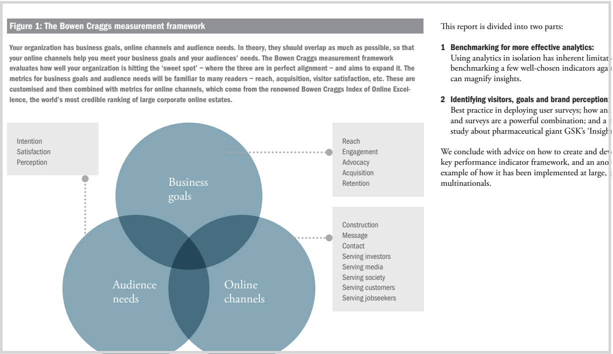

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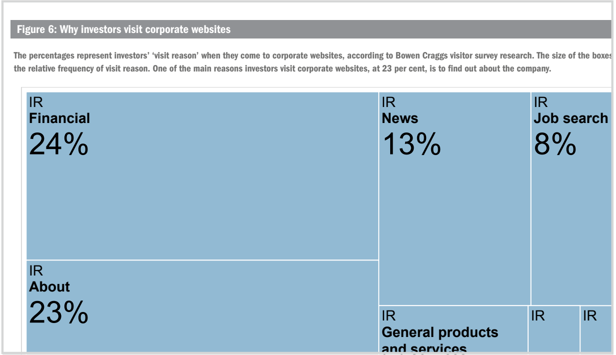

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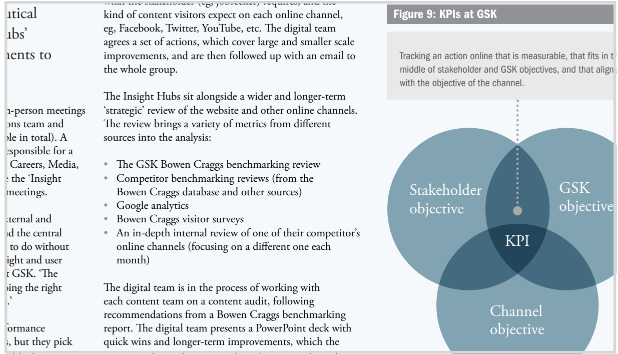

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Introduction: Measurement that sets the agenda

When the head of marketing says, ‘Customers don’t come to the corporate website’, how powerful would it be to be able to say, ‘Yes they do, 20 per cent of visitors are customers, and half come away unsatisfied, which has resulted in a 10 per cent uptick in negative perceptions of our brand.’

We live in an age of mass digital surveillance. Governments, with the help of telecommunications companies, can monitor our every click and trace them back to specific devices. The big internet firms, usually with our consent, capture a great deal of private information about us – our current location, who our friends are, what we search for – in real time. Big Brother, it would seem, rules the online world.

Do you really know your online audience?
Corporate digital managers might say, ‘If only…’ On corporate websites, anonymity is king. It is surprisingly rare for digital communications teams to know who their visitors are, what they want when they arrive on the site and whether they get what they came for. Being unclear on audience needs makes effective communication more difficult than it should be, if not impossible.

‘Measurement’, often spoken about in abstract terms of visits, page views or bounce rates, should be a means to an end, helping to answer the questions: how effective are our online communications and what do we need to change in order to do better? Clear answers to these questions inform the digital strategy, but also make internal stakeholder management more effective. For example, when the head of marketing says, ‘Customers don’t come to the corporate website’, how powerful would it be to be able to say, ‘Yes they do, 20 per cent of visitors are customers, and half of them come away unsatisfied, which has resulted in a 10 per cent uptick in negative perceptions of our brand.’

The hidden opportunity costs of bad measurement
For the past two years, measurement has been high up the list of priorities in our ‘Digital Manager’s Agenda’ surveys. In 2015 it tied with customers as the number one concern and in 2014 it was number two. A separate Bowen Craggs survey in 2014 showed that only one in three respondents had identified key performance indicators (KPIs) and routinely reported against them.

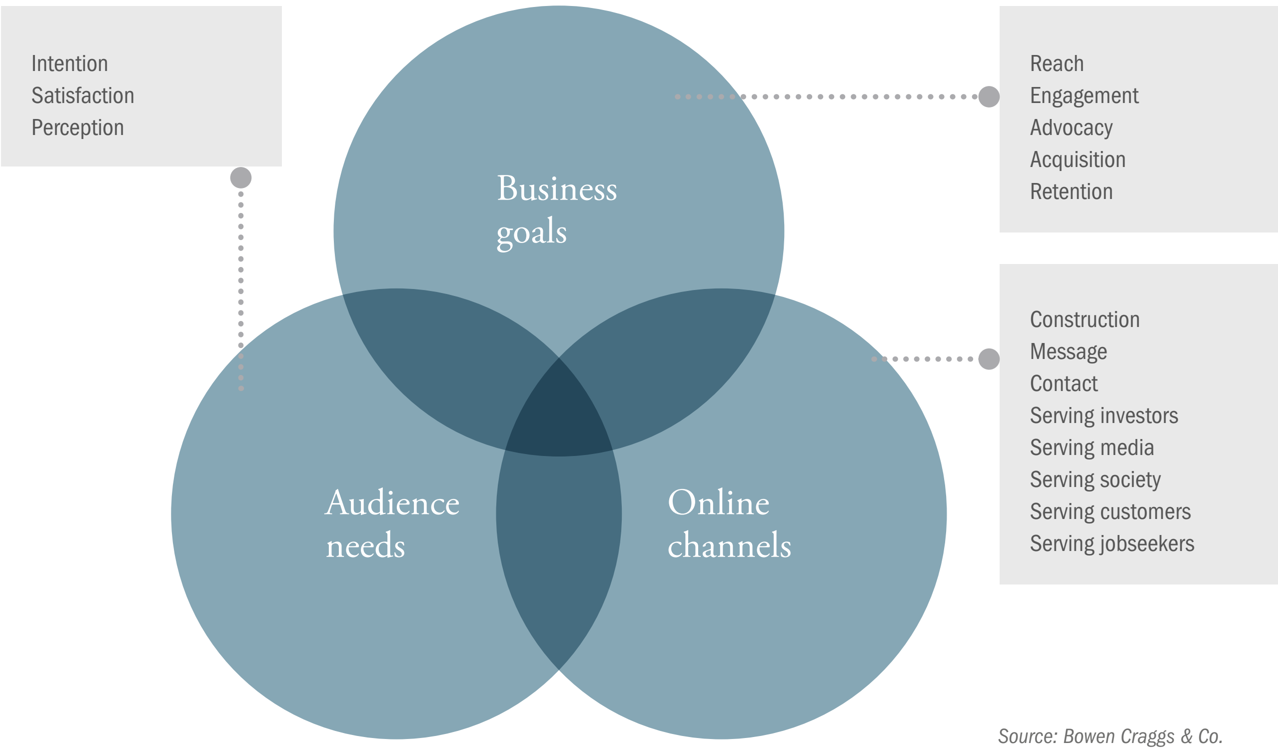
For many digital teams we consult with, there is simply no time for anything but ad hoc cursory reviews of the off-the-shelf analytics, and the best they can say about developing KPIs is that they are ‘a work in progress’. The opportunity costs of this failure can be huge – and unseen – in the form of improvements to the website that are not made and harm to the organization’s reputation among important audiences.

This report presents the Bowen Craggs measurement framework for online corporate communications. It is a best practice process developed over several years of helping large global companies to create and develop measurement programmes.

Introduction: Measurement that sets the agenda

Figure 1: The Bowen Craggs measurement framework

Your organization has business goals, online channels and audience needs. In theory, they should overlap as much as possible, so that your online channels help you meet your business goals and your audiences' needs. The Bowen Craggs measurement framework evaluates how well your organization is hitting the 'sweet spot' – where the three are in perfect alignment – and aims to expand it. The metrics for business goals and audience needs will be familiar to many readers – reach, acquisition, visitor satisfaction, etc. These are customised and then combined with metrics for online channels, which come from the renowned Bowen Craggs Index of Online Excellence, the world's most credible ranking of large corporate online estates.



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

This report is divided into two parts:

1. **Benchmarking for more effective analytics:**
   Using analytics in isolation has inherent limitations but benchmarking a few well-chosen indicators against peers can magnify insights.

2. **Identifying visitors, goals and brand perception:**
   Best practice in deploying user surveys; how analytics and surveys are a powerful combination; and a case study about pharmaceutical giant GSK's 'Insight Hubs'.

We conclude with advice on how to create and develop a key performance indicator framework, and an anonymized example of how it has been implemented at large, global multinationals.

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Part 1: Benchmarking for more effective analytics

Analytics in isolation have inherent limitations but benchmarking a few well-chosen indicators against peers can magnify insights.

Most digital managers are familiar with off-the-shelf analytics applications, Google Analytics or similar, but these provide very little insight without customisation. One of our clients was frustrated that every month her IT department churned out a Webtrends report – with a long list of every metric that it was possible to track – and considered the ‘measurement’ job done. It is a common problem – little thought is given to what the business is trying to achieve, and therefore which analytics are most useful to follow.

A second drawback with off-the-shelf analytics is technical – we find that some clients (or their IT departments) have simply not set them up correctly, with incorrect or duplicated tags, for example. In these scenarios, the analytics reports may not even be correct.

There will always be inherent limitations to using analytics in isolation (and we recommend using analytics combined with a visitor survey and other tools – see Part 2). But if resources are tight, another way to make analytics alone more meaningful is by benchmarking a well-chosen set of metrics with a group of similar companies over a period of time. This can help move analysis beyond short-term page views and bounce rates. Analysing data against peers over a longer time period can help to form a picture of where the website has been, where it is now, and what needs to improve.

Benchmarking helps you have more meaningful and informed conversations with stakeholders. For example, ‘Is an average mobile session duration of 40s good or bad?’ With benchmarking, you can say, if everyone else’s is 1m 28s, then, no, a mobile session duration of 40s is terrible.

Bowen Craggs runs an annual Web Analytics benchmarking project that in 2016 pooled Google Analytics data for 27 major corporate websites (up from 19 companies in 2014 when the project started). The managers of these sites shared their figures with Bowen Craggs on an anonymous basis for 12 months.

Participating companies were from a variety of sectors. The number of annual visits to their websites ranged from 140,000 to 37m. Although the number of visits varied, in terms of serving visitors – whether jobseekers, customers, investors, CSR analysts, journalists or other groups – the goals of the participating websites are broadly similar. Our research also shows that the behaviour of visitors was markedly similar across all sites. The uniformity of goals and visitor behaviour means that our analysis and comparisons are robust for the very busy sites and the relatively quieter ones.

The study follows four data trends for the 27 companies: device usage, traffic sources, social media acquisition and landing pages. Members of the benchmark receive more granular data, but there are some interesting broad trends.

Benchmarking helps you have more meaningful and informed conversations with stakeholders.

Part 1: Benchmarking for more effective analytics

JOIN THE WEB ANALYTICS BENCHMARK

The Web Analytics Benchmark is free to join. Participating companies share their Google Analytics data with Bowen Craggs on an anonymous basis. Benefits include:

- Quick and easy to take part.
- Access to full interactive online dashboard with detailed metrics on traffic, device and social media trends.
- Ability to benchmark figures against similar corporate peers – strategic information that is of big concern to bosses.

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MOBILE VISITS GROW

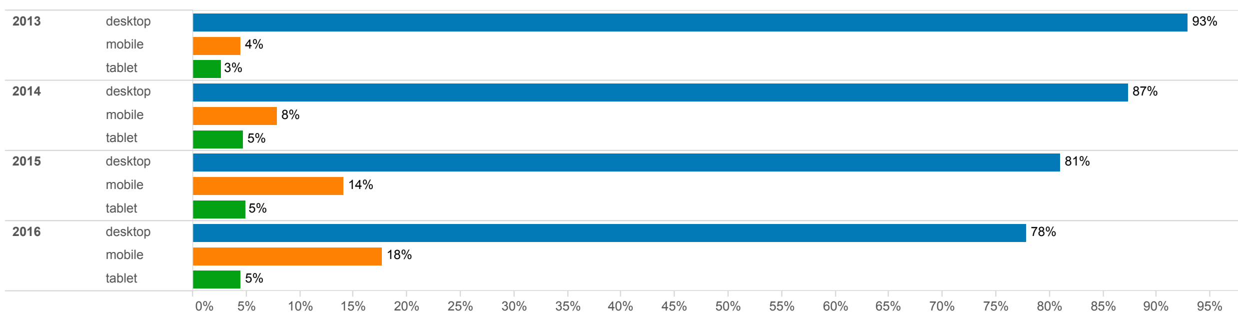
The percentage of visits from mobile phones to the corporate sites in the benchmark has grown again in 2016 compared to a year ago, up from 14 per cent to 18 per cent. On average, nearly one in five visits to corporate sites comes via a mobile phone. The share of desktop visits has fallen, but from a high original count, and it remains on 78 per cent. Tablet growth has stalled for the third year in a row, at 5 per cent.

There has been a growing variation between companies in terms of the number of visits from mobile, and this year's data saw that variation increase. For example, the company with the lowest number of mobile visits was 6 per cent and the highest was 32 per cent. The average figures also hide regional differences – in some developing countries, for example, viewership on a mobile screen can be 50 per cent and above.

There is also variation in bounce rates between desktop viewers and mobile viewers, at just under 50 per cent for desktop viewers and just under 60 per cent on mobile. Session duration averages also vary – with desktop viewers staying longer, for an average of 2m 23s compared with 1m 28s for mobile viewers. These average figures may not be all that surprising, but they help put your own figures in context. As mentioned above, you may think your 'short' mobile session duration at 40s is ok because 'mobile session duration is supposed to be short' but if the average is 1m 28s, it might prompt a re-evaluation.

The general data shows that 'mobile first' is still a flawed strategy for corporate websites, with so many visitors coming

Figure 2: Website traffic by device 2013-2016



Source: Bowen Craggs Web Analytics Benchmark, 2016

Part 1: Benchmarking for more effective analytics

Figure 3: The continuing importance of corporate website home pages

The vast majority of corporate website visits, 70 per cent, begin on the home page, a share that has barely changed over the last three years. It is often argued that the home page is less important because Google is sending visitors deep within sites, and that is true, but the data from our benchmark suggests that the home page is still vital. For corporate home page advice and best practice, see the free Bowen Craggs report, Window on your world, here.

Percentage of visitors arriving on corporate websites via the home page 2014-2016

Source: Bowen Craggs Web Analytics Benchmark, 2016

in through desktops (and indeed many visitors will likely be visiting on both types of devices for different tasks, eg, a jobseeker looking at company information on a mobile, while waiting to fill out the application on a desktop or laptop.) Better to adopt a strategy that gives mobile and desktop screens appropriate weight, depending on how your visitors are accessing the site and the tasks they are trying to accomplish.

Other trends identified in the Bowen Craggs analytics benchmark include:

- Unpaid search is still the dominant way corporate sites acquire traffic, with one in two visits acquired this way. So SEO is still important.

- Direct traffic accounted for 1 in 3 visits (traffic from entering the website directly, through untagged links in email, offline sources etc.).

- Social media still drives little traffic to the corporate site. In 2016 1.5% of traffic (or 15 visits in every thousand) was acquired across all social media, an increase on 1% (10 visits per 1,000) in 2015 but referrals from other sites still drove 16% (160 visits per 1,000) of traffic in 2016.

- Facebook is driving 7 in 1000 visits, more than LinkedIn in with 6 in 1000 but still a very small channel.

Part 1: Benchmarking for more effective analytics

‘Measurement based on analytics alone is still rudimentary and incomplete, because you are looking at visits, not visitors. You do not see who visits your site, what they want to do or whether they achieve their goals.’

- However, some companies are driving significantly more traffic from social media. One company in the benchmark acquired almost 4% of visits from Facebook.

- LinkedIn provides around 1% of traffic to several sites. The number is small but it is reasonable to consider these to be high value visits because, coming from LinkedIn, they are more likely to be employees or jobseekers that have, potentially, clicked on a job advertisement.

- There are several reasons why social media usually drives little traffic, but sometimes yields results. Sponsorship plays a role. Facebook and Twitter make it difficult for users to leave their platform - these platforms restrict distribution to a small part of a company’s audience, unless the link is sponsored. Timing and subject matter are also important. One of our clients’ tweets were 100 times more successful in driving traffic than normal when they were tied to an external, live event. However, not every tweet is about driving traffic to the corporate website; it could be about getting retweets, gaining more followers, driving visitors to a blog post.

These are useful insights (and there are more granular lessons to be learned for companies participating in the benchmark) but measurement based on analytics alone is still rudimentary and incomplete, because you are looking at visits, not visitors. You do not see who visits your site, what they want to do or whether they achieve their goals. Technically there are less scrupulous ways to find out via cookies and other tracking methods, but these are usually not appropriate for corporate websites. Some companies have tried log-ins, but the majority of visitors to corporate websites are one-off or infrequent visitors so are unlikely to take the time to register. For the moment, visitor surveys are the best way to understand individual visitors (see Part 2).

Part 2: Identifying visitors, goals and brand perception

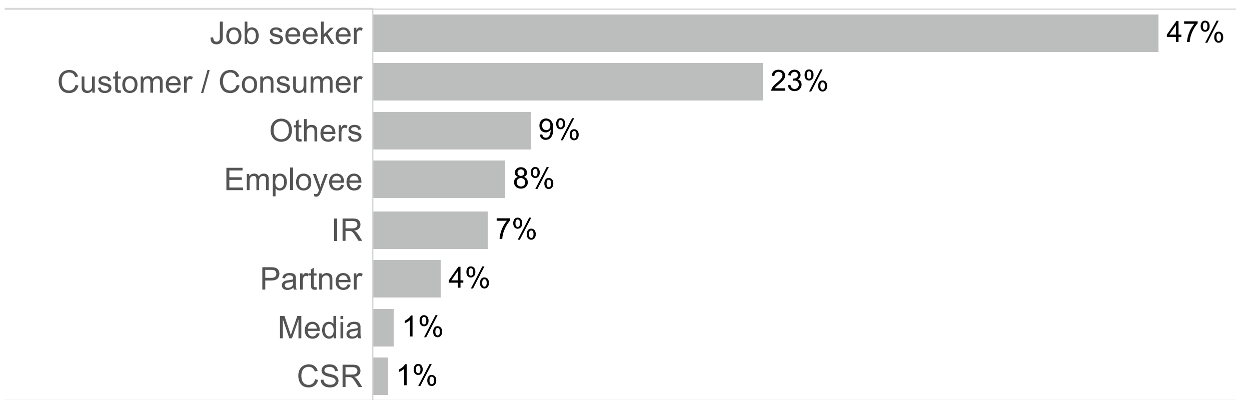
Analytics provide one view of your website's impact, but the data is disconnected from actual visitors – who they are, what they need and get from your site.

Without this level of understanding, the inevitable internal debates about what should go on the site happen in a vacuum. Take, for example, content for the investor section. The digital team has a guess about what investor audiences want, the investor relations team has a guess, and senior managers might take another view. Without consulting the audience directly, the website ends up being built for the company and not for the audience.

An effective web survey is unobtrusive and asks relatively few questions (the Bowen Craggs visitor survey uses eight). The questions need to be relevant – general enough for benchmarking purposes, but tailored to the company's audiences – for example, customer questions for a pharmaceutical company should be different for an industrial manufacturer (in the background, however, these can be organized as 'customer' responses, which enable benchmarking across sectors). Completion rates should be monitored closely to ensure the survey is not annoying visitors. For example, three quarters of Bowen Craggs visitor surveys are completed, an unusually high rate, and which demonstrates that they are being well-received.

Asking visitors to self-identify is the important first step. Figure 4 shows average data from more than 300,000 responses to Bowen Craggs visitor surveys that have been deployed on corporate sites across a range of sectors.

Figure 4: Top visitor groups to corporate websites, according to Bowen Craggs visitor surveys



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

Part 2: Identifying visitors, goals and brand perception

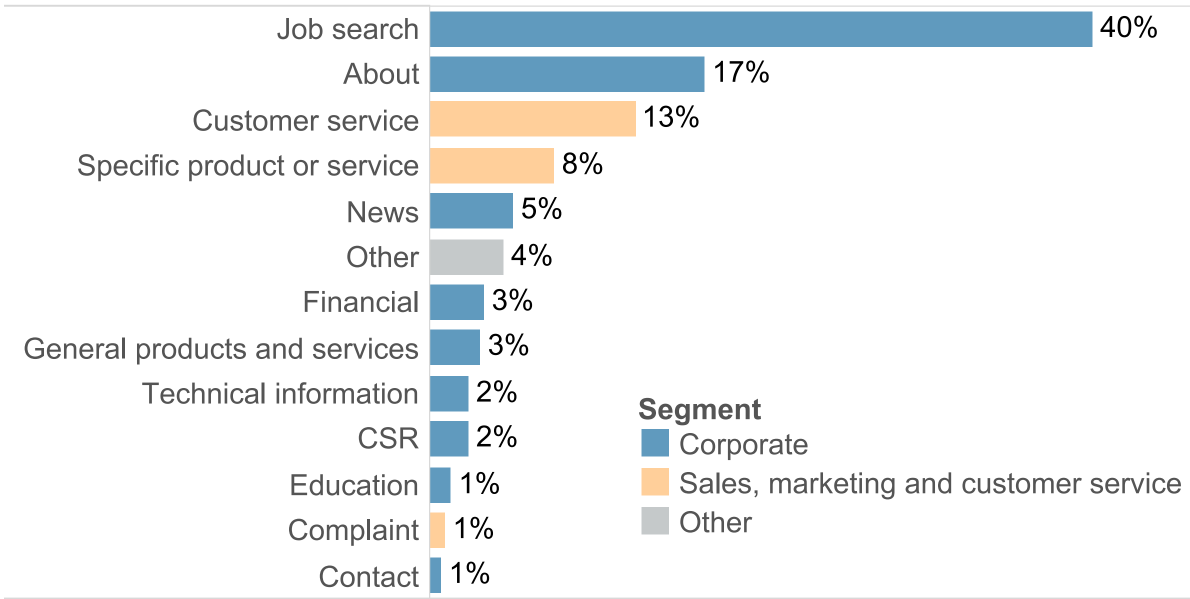
On average, jobseekers and customers are the largest visitor survey respondent groups to corporate websites. There is an element of 'survey bias' in these results – for example, jobseekers, customers and employees are the visitor groups most likely to take the time to fill out visitor surveys, which dampens the percentages for journalists and investors. However, regardless of the relative percentages between visitor groups, it is undeniable, for example, that customers are a large group of visitors to corporate websites.

The second important point to understand is 'why' people are coming to your site.

Visit reason data is especially useful when broken down by visitor. For example, our research shows that one of the main reasons 'investors' visit corporate sites is to find out about the company. This highlights the important fact that they do not only visit to find financial information (see Figure 6).

Additionally, the above visitor data confirms the importance of easy navigation between website sections, something the methodology for the Bowen Craggs Index of Online Excellence has always emphasised. We also use visitor survey data to inform our 'personas' or user profiles for investors, media, CSR professionals, jobseekers and customers when we evaluate websites and social channels for the Index.

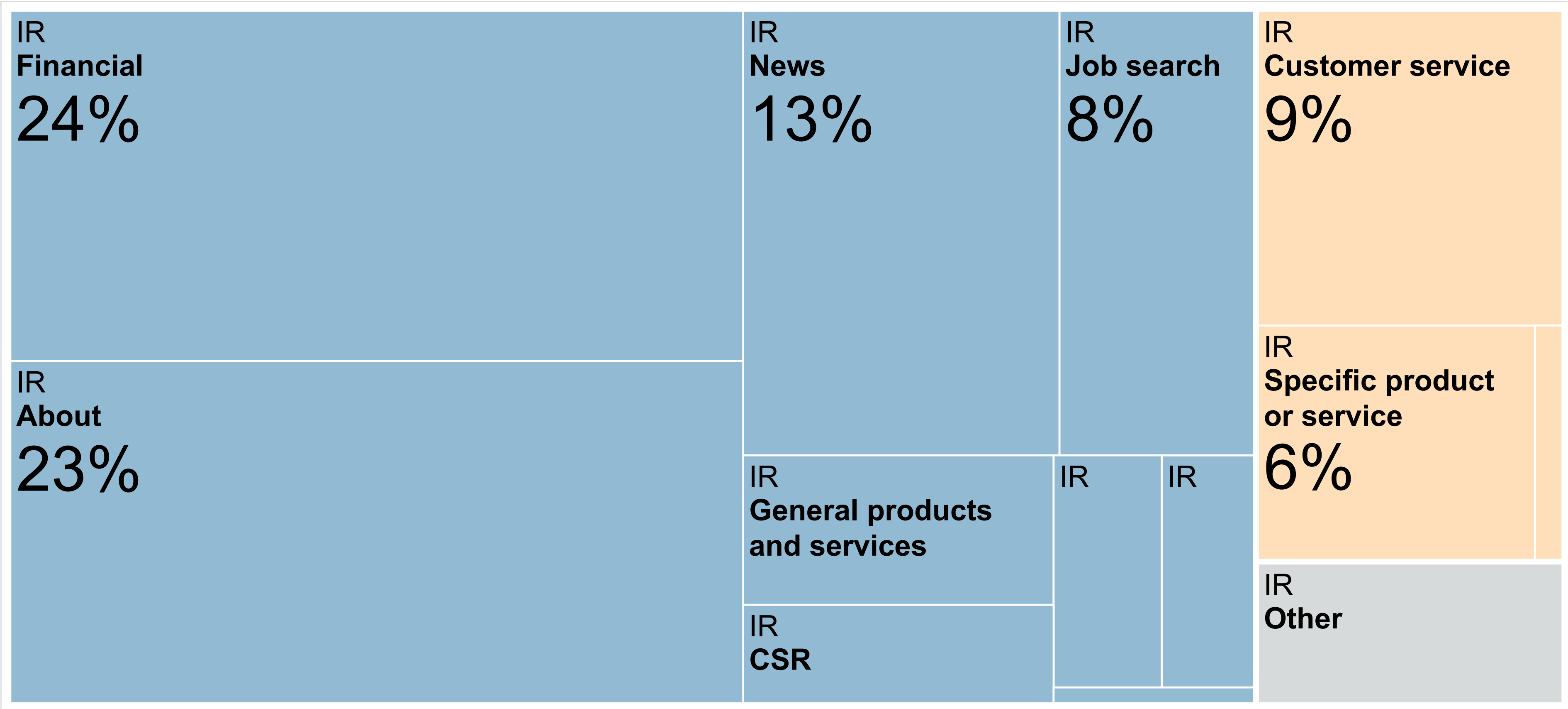
Figure 5: Visit reason - 'What was your main reason for visiting today?'



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

Figure 6: Why investors visit corporate websites

The percentages represent investors' 'visit reason' when they come to corporate websites, according to Bowen Craggs visitor survey research. The size of the boxes for 'Financial', 'About', 'News', etc, reflects the relative frequency of visit reason. One of the main reasons investors visit corporate websites, at 23 per cent, is to find out about the company.



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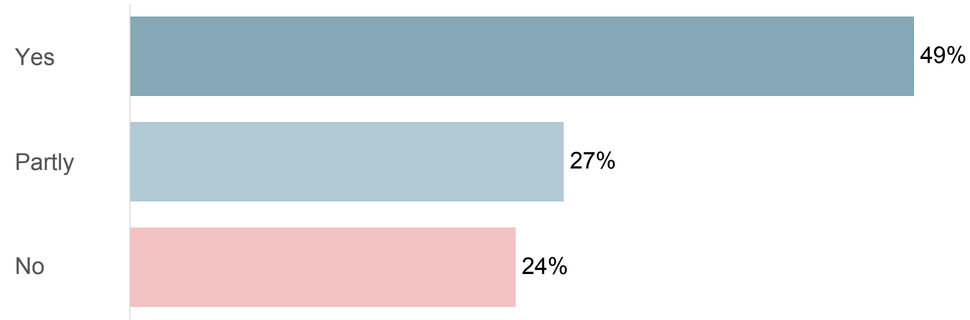
Part 2: Identifying visitors, goals and brand perception

'Goal achievement' statistics complete the picture and allow for deeper analysis (see Figure 7). Goal achievement can also be broken down by the type of visitor to see whether the site is succeeding or not. For example, a company might want to see goal achievement statistics for visitors trying to find background on the company or product information. One client we work with discovered that customers visiting the corporate website were rating their visits as failures because they could not find general product information and contact information. This was a wake-up call – they had made a wrong assumption ('customers do not come to our corporate site') and as a result were disappointing a large customer group.

Combining 'goal achievement' figures with brand perception questions can create powerful messages for senior leaders, tying communication efforts, sometimes seen as secondary to more important business goals, to wider issues of reputation management (See Figure 8).

Finally, open-ended comments from visitor surveys can sometimes seem overwhelming. But when they are used in a segmented way, they can help to make a powerful case when combined with the figures for how many visitors went away unsatisfied. They can help to explain exactly why there were problems, and challenge internal assumptions about how specific aspects of the website are performing. For example, the verbatim comments from customers who failed in their visits (eg, 'I could not find anything I needed on the site'; 'the product info is thin') can bring an otherwise seemingly theoretical measurement presentation to life and therefore immediately convince people in the business that action needs to be taken.

Figure 7: Goal achievement - 'Did you achieve the goal of your visit today?'

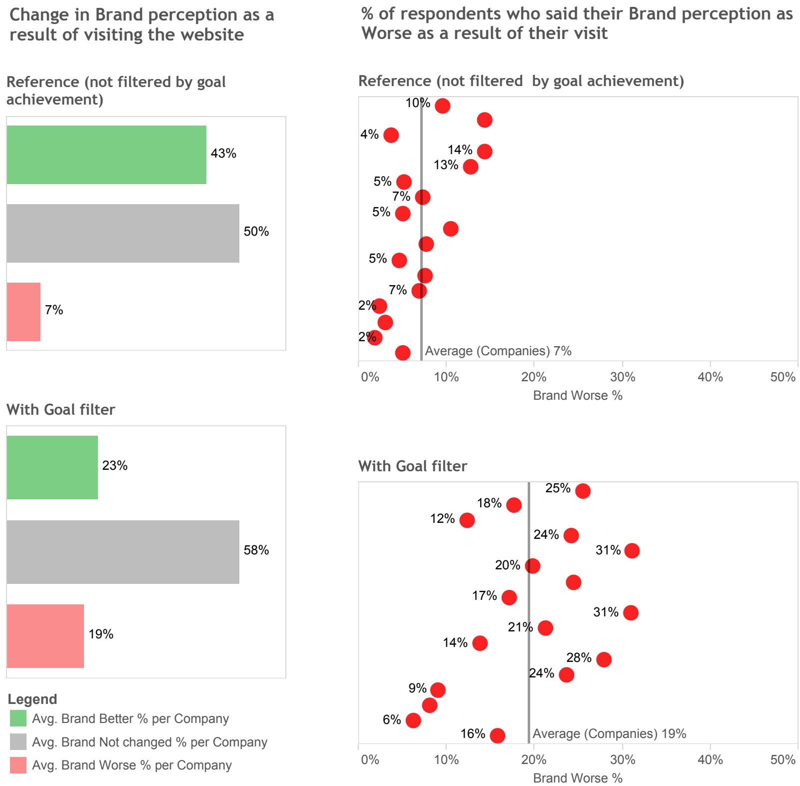


Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

Part 2: Identifying visitors, goals and brand perception

Figure 8: Goal achievement and brand perception

Visitors who do not achieve their goals on corporate websites often leave with a lower opinion of the company. For example, in our visitor surveys 19 per cent of respondents who did not achieve their goals leave with a worse perception of the company, compared with only 7 per cent of all visitors. The red dots represent the companies in the Bowen Craggs Analytics Benchmark. Although there is considerable variation in goal achievement between companies, the correlation between goal failure and a worsening opinion of the company is universal, and therefore statistically significant.



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

POWERFUL COMBINATION – BRINGING ANALYTICS AND SURVEYS TOGETHER

Connecting the analytics from actual website sessions to visitor satisfaction metrics is something that e-commerce sites have been doing for a while, but it is a new concept for corporate websites. We have recently started a project that brings the two data sources together in a powerful combination for the first time.

For example, a company's products and services landing page may have a high bounce rate. The company may have thought this was ok, because visitors were being rerouted to product or brand sites. However, looking into survey data from this group may reveal that visitors are saying they failed to achieve their goals, meaning they did not find anything useful on the landing page, suggesting that changes are needed.

Another example: page view data may indicate that a company's clients are looking at lots of pages on the site, suggesting they are using the site to get a wide range of information. Survey data might indicate that, on the contrary, they are unsatisfied and searching, in vain, for information that they need.

Survey data combined with analytics adds an extra dimension to segmentation, the ability to ask more questions of the data, and make improvements as a result.

Best practice case study: The Insights Hub at GSK

How the UK-based pharmaceutical giant uses monthly 'Insight Hubs' to guide continuous improvements to the online estate.

The Insight Hubs are monthly, two-hour in-person meetings with the central GSK digital communications team and additional 'content owners' (about 10 people in total). A wider group of people, each of which are responsible for a section of the corporate website (Investors, Careers, Media, Research, etc) or a piece of content, receive the 'Insight dashboard email', which comes out of the meetings.

'The content teams all have a stake in our external and internal channels, particularly GSK.com, and the central digital team cannot do the things they want to do without them,' said Miles Tomlinson, director of insight and user experience (internal & external channels), at GSK. 'The Insight Hubs get them mobilised around doing the right things online, not just adding more content.'

The digital team tracks 20 website key performance indicators (KPIs) and 20 social media KPIs, but they pick out four or five areas of focus for each monthly discussion, Miles said. These could be, for example, how many low-level pages are jobseekers visiting before applying (a metric of how informed they are about GSK as an employer); or for customers, how many have been successfully redirected to brand sites. The KPIs follow a framework (see Figure 9, right): an intersection of what GSK wants to communicate, what the stakeholder (eg, jobseeker) requires, and the kind of content visitors expect on each online channel, eg, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. The digital team agrees a set of actions, which cover large and smaller scale improvements, and are then followed up with an email to the whole group.

The Insight Hubs sit alongside a wider and longer-term 'strategic' review of the website and other online channels. The review brings a variety of metrics from different sources into the analysis:

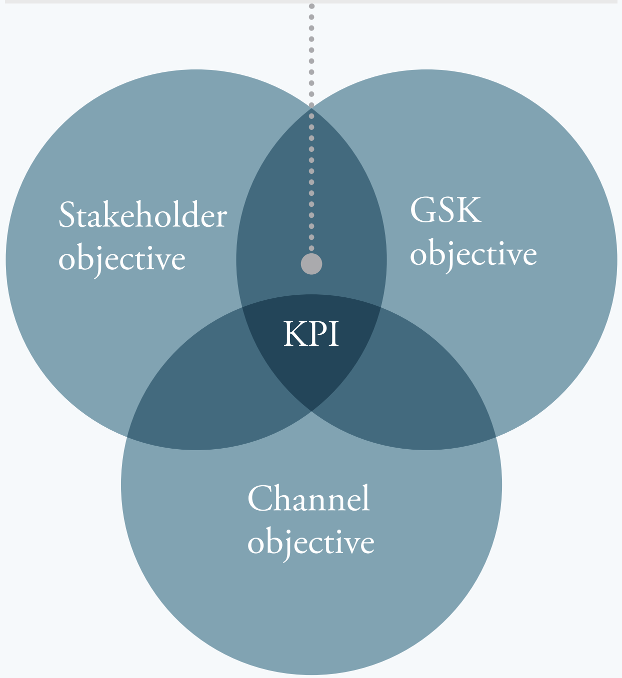
- The GSK Bowen Craggs benchmarking review
- Competitor benchmarking reviews (from the Bowen Craggs database and other sources)
- Google analytics
- Bowen Craggs visitor surveys
- An in-depth internal review of one of their competitor's online channels (focusing on a different one each month)

The digital team is in the process of working with each content team on a content audit, following recommendations from a Bowen Craggs benchmarking report. The digital team presents a PowerPoint deck with quick wins and longer-term improvements, which the teams are also in the process of implementing throughout the year.

'One of the objectives is to pull in insight from different avenues and do something with it,' Miles said. 'Everyone talks about data and insight, but not many people turn it into action.'

Figure 9: KPIs at GSK

Tracking an action online that is measurable, that fits in the middle of stakeholder and GSK objectives, and that aligns with the objective of the channel.



Source: GSK

Conclusion: The rewards of a KPI framework

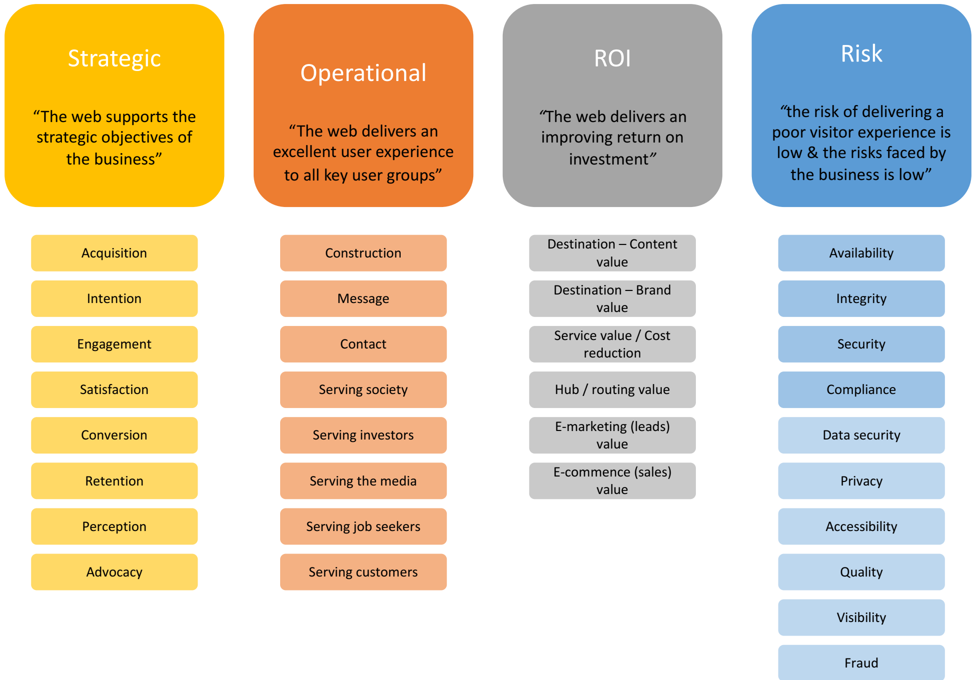
Each of the tools discussed so far in this report can be used in isolation. However, it is more effective to pull everything into a ‘KPI framework’ that aligns online communications with the organization’s mission, values and objectives (see Figure 10).

A KPI framework clarifies how the communications goals of corporate online channels – website, country sites, social media, etc – fit in with the business’s goals – selling more stuff, expansion abroad, attracting talent, building a reputation for sustainability, etc.

The overarching KPI framework is more difficult to achieve than more tactical, ad hoc approaches, but the rewards are greater too. You can build business cases for improvements more easily and build consensus among internal stakeholders whose needs are disparate, and at times, conflicting. The KPI framework becomes a long-term tool that shows areas for improvement and the ways to measure improvement.

Figure 10: The Bowen Craggs KPI framework

The Bowen Craggs KPI framework has four ‘streams’: strategic (does the online presence support business goals), operational (if we know what job the web should be doing, is it doing them well), return on investment (is it delivering monetary value through sales lead acquisition) and risk (contravening privacy and data laws, accessibility, reputational risk from a poor experience). There are a number of metrics underneath each stream. For example, a metric under ‘strategic’ might evaluate how well the business is acquiring jobseekers; ‘ROI’ might look at lead acquisition; an ‘operational’ metric might look at how well the home page is putting across the company’s message. See Figure 11, next page, for an example of the framework in action.



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

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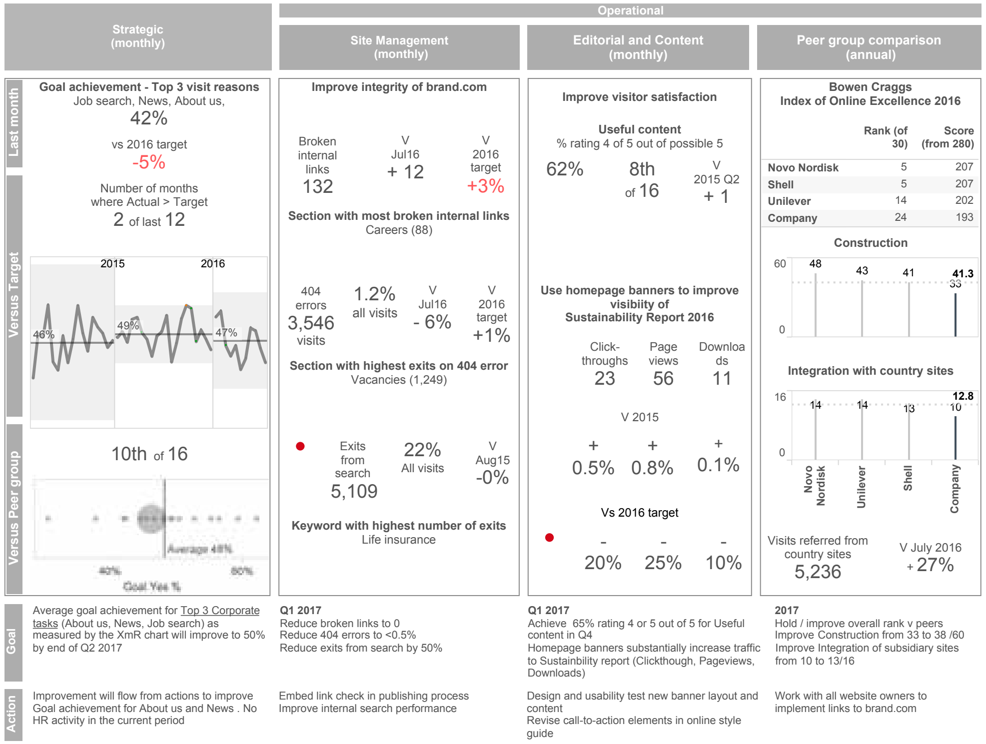
Conclusion: The rewards of key performance indicator framework

Figure 11: The framework in action: ‘company.com’



Source: Bowen Craggs & Co.

The company.com scorecard states the web team’s goals (each stated as KPI + target + timeline), summarises actions to achieve those goals and shows progress towards achieving them. Alerts (red highlights) identify problem areas at a glance. KPIs (embedded in the goals) should be few in number but additional metrics may provide useful context. Various forms of comparison can be used: versus a previous period of time (e.g. last month), versus expected value, versus target (most important) and ranking in a peer group. The score-card might also provide commentary e.g. ‘worst performing section’. The key requirement is that the scorecard provides sufficient detail and granularity regarding activity to support a constructive review of the team’s activity each month or quarter.

MEASUREMENT – 10 BEST PRACTICE TIPS

1. Build measurement into every program, project and annual plan
2. Use measurement to drive continuous improvement
3. Don’t start with the data, start by thinking about the story you need to tell
4. Build a framework for your goals, KPIs and metrics
5. Combine multiple perspectives - analytics, surveys, expert reviews, etc
6. Challenge your data (and your IT department and your agency)
7. Measure progress towards targets
8. Work at an appropriate level of granularity
9. Benchmark against peers
10. Don’t ‘report’ - communicate, by telling a story

Contact Dan Drury if you’d like Bowen Craggs to review your approach to measurement and offer our tips on how you can improve.

About Bowen Craggs

WE REVIEW.

WE MEASURE.

WE ADVISE.

To make your website and social media channels better for your business and your customers.

Visit our website **www.bowencraggs.com** for practical advice and deep analysis for online communications professionals.

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WHAT WE DO

We are experts in global online corporate communications. We help you improve the effectiveness of your websites, mobile and social channels.

You can rely on the independence of our advice because we do not build websites. What we do is help you to improve your effectiveness with clear strategy, expert benchmarking, market research, analytics, best practice and content strategy.

Our research – gathered over 14 years and used by more than 50 of the Fortune Global 500 – can help you find and maintain the right course. Every year we publish the Bowen Craggs Index of Online Excellence, which is established as the most credible ranking of large corporate online estates, and provides a deep database of best practice.

Our research – gathered over 14 years and used by more than 50 of the Fortune Global 500 – can help you find and maintain the right course

FURTHER RESOURCES

Bowen Craggs is unique: we specialise in group-level digital communications. Here are three ways you can benefit from our knowledge and expertise:

Access research that will improve your online strategy
The world's deepest analysis of corporate online estates.
Constant audience research across all stakeholder groups.
A trusted and growing global knowledge-sharing network.
These are the cornerstones of our research reports and bespoke consultancy.

EXPLORE THE WORD'S MOST POWERFUL RESOURCE FOR GLOBAL WEB MANAGERS

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