

Striking the Right Balance of New Site Visitors vs. Returning A CNN Newsource White Paper

For web publishers there are two kinds of audience for your site: those who are visiting for the first time, and those who are returning viewers. Each is important for different reasons:

- New site visitors
 - Drive growth in unique users and impressions
 - Validate search engine marketing (SEM) and other direct marketing
 - Often are tied to cross-platform marketing such as promotion during television programs
 - Are a key performance indicator involving a brand's outreach to new audiences and demographics
- Returning visitors
 - Validate social media marketing initiatives
 - Demonstrate appeal to target audiences
 - Allow the development of more comprehensive audience profiles
 - Demonstrate trends in brand loyalty

For these reasons it's important to have a mix of both types of visitors. But is there a correct mix to strive for? Most experts think the ratio varies by industry, with ecommerce sites needing more new visitors to increase sales, while publishers may rely on a more balanced mix or even favor returning users to take advantage of brand loyalty.

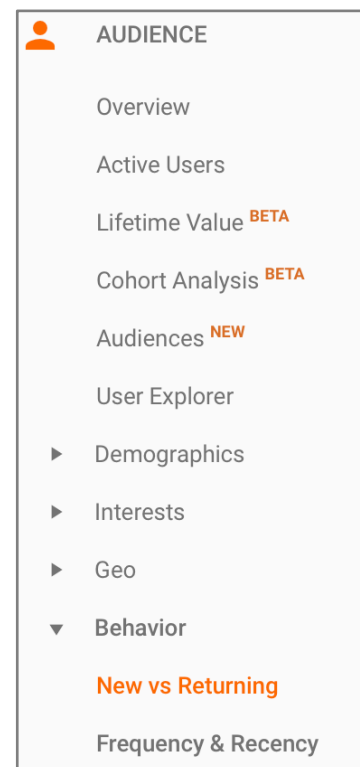
If we assume you are looking for a 50/50 split, or one higher with returning audience, how do you know what you have today and what techniques can influence your mix?

Finding your new vs. returning visitor ratio

Finding your current ratio is easy. From your Google Analytics dashboard select the Audience menu item. Under that menu select Behavior, then select New vs Returning. (See image to the right.)

The resulting chart and table will break down the user types in two rows. In the table to its right, you can look at five key metrics associated with each:

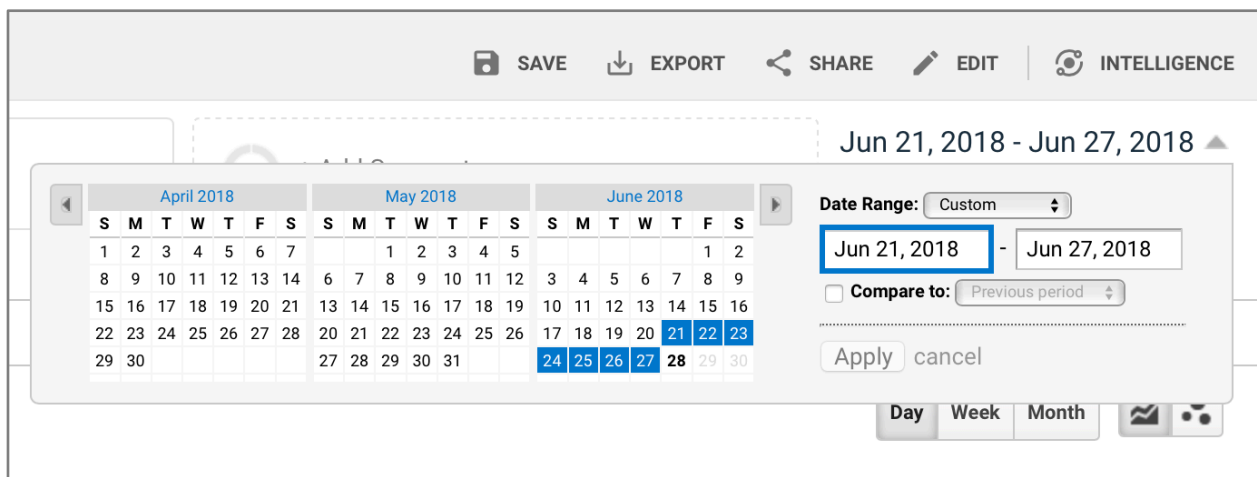
- User, the actual breakdown by number and percentage between the two types
- Sessions, the total number and percentage share of session by each type



- Bounce Rate, e.g. how many of each user type came into your site then left immediately
- Pages/Session, the average number of pages viewed per session for each type of user
- Avg. Session Duration, how much time each type of user spent on average during a visit

You'll see that some of these metrics are very similar for both user types while others vary greatly. Think about your goals for the site and how these metrics reflect your success. There is no one-size-fits-all benchmark for the right number, so you need to analyze what you consider a success when it comes to these metrics.

It's also vital to track these metrics over time. After noting the current numbers, change the time frame of the report (done with the pulldown menu at the upper right of the graph as seen in the image below.)



Start by using a week as your basic unit of time. Record the current ratio, then move back in time to see how it has changed. Keep a record of these metrics over time to see how the ratio changes. By tracking the ratio and the supporting key metrics over time, you'll be able to see how your marketing and site content affects the mix.

What to do if your ratio is off?

You may find that you want to try to change your new vs. returning ratio. What are the best ways to do that? While there are no set prescriptions, and all sites and audiences have their own unique characteristics and habits, here are a few things to try.

Increasing returning visitors

If your percentage of returning visitors is lower than you would like, consider these steps to increase it:

- Offer signups to various marketing instruments

Email newsletters are the most common (and frankly oldest) means to alert existing users to what's new on your site and draw them back. Consider finding a way to highlight newsletter subscriptions in your stories, social channels and other key pages to drive signups.

- Step up social media posts

Some social media posts can be very effective in driving traffic back to your site. Consider increasing the frequency of these posts, or change the style in which they are written in order to drive more traffic from current users who also are part of your social media network. Experiment and track what works so it can be replicated.

Which social networks are the best for this? Twitter is most effective since users generally do not consume media on Twitter, but instead are accustomed to linking out to the source. Facebook and Instagram are generally less effective since those users prefer to remain within the service and consume there. However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't try them. You may find they can be effective for you. It's worth trying various techniques to see which moves the needle for your brand and site.

Remember, too, to post on social media at the right times of day and at the right frequency to deliver the best results. CNN Newsource has produced a handy infographic to guide you. You can download it [here](#).

- Increase on-air or in-print mentions and integration of digital properties

While this method can serve to increase both returning and new visitors, it's safe to assume that someone who is a loyal consumer of your television or print product is likely to have visited the digital version of your brand at some point. Find innovative ways to highlight your digital offerings in your legacy product to try to drive users back more frequently.

Increasing new visitors

If your percentage of new visitors is the problem, these methods might help to increase that metric:

- Optimize your site for search engines

Your site's earned (vs. bought) traffic will come from searches that return your site to users high on the first page. (When was the last time you clicked onto the second page of Google results?) The only way to get high placement on these pages without paying for it is through the proper optimization of your site for search, i.e. search engine optimization (SEO).

If your site is older, or perhaps has never been optimized for search, consider working with a third party to give it a proper SEO treatment to improve its appeal to search engines. A small expenditure to optimize your site can result in a big change in results, particularly when it comes to acquiring new users.

- Consider a paid search campaign

Another way to leverage the search engines to drive traffic to your site is through paid search or Search Engine Marketing (SEM). SEM allows you not only to drive more users, but to target specific demographics or behaviors and bring them to your site. For example, a new focus on high school football may appeal to students, 18 to 24. SEM allows you to target just those users with your messaging and drive them to the featured content.

Summary: Steps to Success

To recap:

- Site owners should know what the balance of new vs. returning visitors are, both now and as a trend over time.
- The ratio of users is easy to find in your Google Analytics dashboard. Go to Audience > Behavior > New vs. Returning.
- If the ratio is not what you desire, you can take steps to drive more of either type of user:
 - To drive more return visitors, consider various forms of outreach using all your platforms such as on-air or in-print, email newsletters, and most importantly, social media.
 - To drive more new users, optimize your site for search engines (SEO) and consider paid search campaigns (SEM).

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