DAA's Digital Analytics Cookbook
Sample Recipe: Form Validation Error Tracking

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Introduction

We assume all visitors fill out forms easily and perfectly...but when we track that assumption, it doesn't necessarily hold up!

Analysis Overview

The last step in many key conversions is often the successful completion of a form. Most forms have some level of form validation on them that prompt the user if they try to submit the form and there is an issue with it. Since form validation is often a client-side activity, the development team often stops at the point of providing the visitor with an error message, but there isn't any tracking of what errors occur and how often. Consequently, there is no visibility into what percent of users are successful at completing the form on the first try, and, more importantly, there is no visibility into what the most common errors are.

Analysis Benefits

1) Improving form completion rate (order conversions, lead conversions, registrations, etc.)
2) Improving the customer experience

Analysis Recipe

1) Assess the form experience. Identify the different ways a visitor may click "Submit" and the form does not successfully submit. What information is provided to the user in those situations? How is it provided?
2) Determine how best to capture that information in your web analytics platform
3) Work with your development team to capture the errors when they occur. Since there is typically some sort of error handling function, piggybacking off of that to either populate a data layer object or to directly make a web analytics call can be a straightforward activity. Try to capture as much detail as possible (for instance, don't simply capture "required field missing" -- it's better to capture "required field missing - email address; sometimes).
4) Once data is being collected, determine a baseline volume of error submissions and set up an automated alert to trigger if those errors jump up.
5) Assess what the most common errors triggered are and whether their volume warrants digging in further.
6) Assess the form conversion rate for visits that trigger at least one error (and, possibly, break this out by individual error) to see which errors most often lead to form abandonment.

Potential Analysis Action Items

If a particular type of error occurs frequently, assess the form and why that might be happening. Are the instructions unclear? Is a required field "hidden" based on the layout? Recommend changes to the form design as warranted (or, better yet, recommend A/B testing changes to the form design) If there is a spike in errors, confirm that the spike is not simply due to a spike in traffic to the form, and, if not investigate the form to see if a validation process has broken (form error spikes often occur concurrently with site updates that inadvertently break something).

Vendor Specific Tips and Tricks

For Google Analytics, event tracking is a common way to go. Use something like Event Category = Form Submission Error, Event Action = [Form Name], Event Label = [Error Description]. Another option for Google Analytics is to use a combination of custom dimensions and custom metrics. The form name and error can be combined in a single custom dimension, or they can be split across two. A custom metric can be used for counting the number of form submission errors. If additional custom metrics are being used for the form, then this approach may be preferred to event tracking. For Adobe Analytics, an eVar that identifies the specific form (or page name for the form), another eVar that contains the error detail, and a "Form Submission Error" event works well.

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