Omniture Webmetrics Report #3 (February 2006)

A short report this month, as I have been working on privacy policy issues with Jim and Eileen.

The number of visits to nsdl.org rose from 9,805 in December 2005, to 11,907 in January 2006. This increase was expected, and is probably caused by a return to school after the Christmas vacation. Based on AWStats records of previous annual fluctuations, it is expected that this upward trend will continue through February and March. April may however see a decline in traffic.

Site 'stickiness' – that is, the proportion of visitors who view more than one page in succession – appears to be holding up.

In the case of the wider NSDL, traffic to all Omniture-monitored NSDL projects rose from 92,054 visits in December 2005, to 114,902 visitors in January 2006. This upward trend may continue, but as we have only have two months of 'All NSDL' data so far, this trend is hard to predict with any certainty.

Finally, I have been working with Jim Burger and Eileen McIlvain to design standard, boilerplate privacy policy sub-clauses that can be used to cover NSDL's web metrics activities.

Contents

1 Visits

Overall traffic

The number of visits to nsdl.org rose from 9,805 in December 2005 to 11,907 in January 2006 (Chart 2). This is an increase of 21.4% over December's traffic (Chart 3). A likely explanation for this increase is the return to schools after the Christmas holidays. January's upturn can also be seen as part of a pattern of annual fluctuations in web site traffic identified by Dean X (Chart 1). If (as seems likely) Dean's stats do reliably predict monthly fluctuations, we may expect traffic to increase through February and into March, before declining again in April and May. At this point – at the end of April – we will be in a position to carry out the first year-on-year comparisons in nsdl.org traffic and to make some remarks about possible annual trends. The figures for January 2006 suggest that traffic in April 2006 will be well in excess of 12,000 visits, and possibly somewhere near 15,000 visits (c.f. 8328 visits in 2005).

Sticky visits

The number of sticky visits (that is, of visitors that looked at two pages or more) increased, as did the numbers of people who entered through the front page and who then went on to view at least one more page on the site (front page sticky visits) (Chart 4a). Expressed as a *percentage* of overall traffic, sticky visits declined slightly in January; however, as a percentage, they have also remained in the 50%-60% range for several months now (Chart 4b), both for visitors who enter the site through the front page, and also for visitors who enter the site through other pages.

As has been suggested in previous reports, front page stickiness is a useful metric for NSDL, in that it reflects the actions of people who are motivated to explore and/or use at least one page on the nsdl.org.

All NSDL traffic

The 'all NSDL traffic' metric was implemented in mid-November 2005. The figure for December traffic was 92,054 visits, and for January it was 114,902 visitors, an increase of 24.8% (c.f. a 21.4% increase for nsdl.org). We have limited data for this metric at the moment, but if the traffic follows the same trends as nsdl.org we may expect it to increase to up to approximately 150k visits/month in March, before declining in April and May.
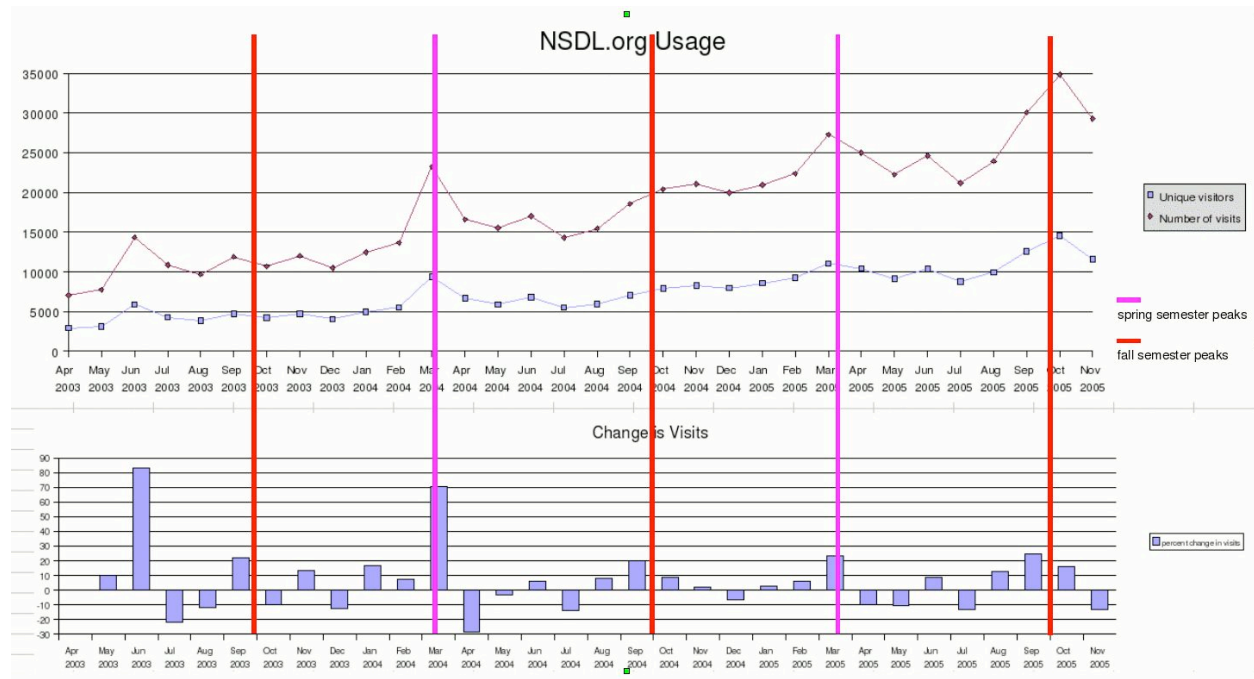

Chart 1: Annual fluctuations in nsdl.org traffic, April 2003-November 2005
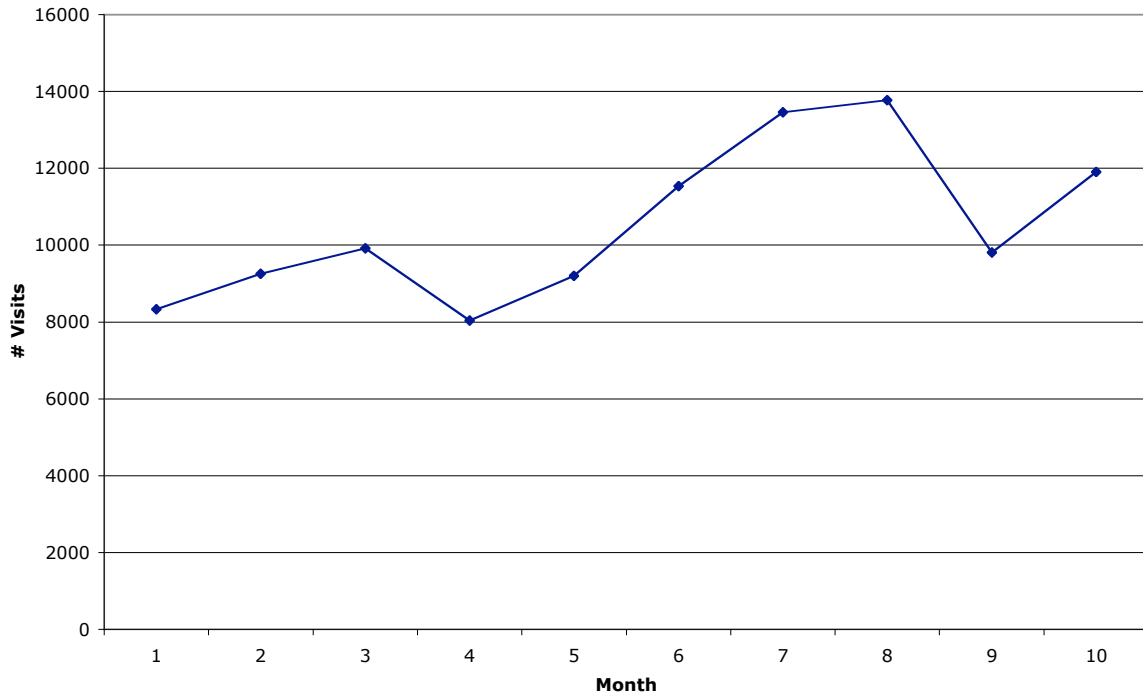
Monthly Visits, April 2005-January 2006

Chart 2: Monthly visits to nsdl.org

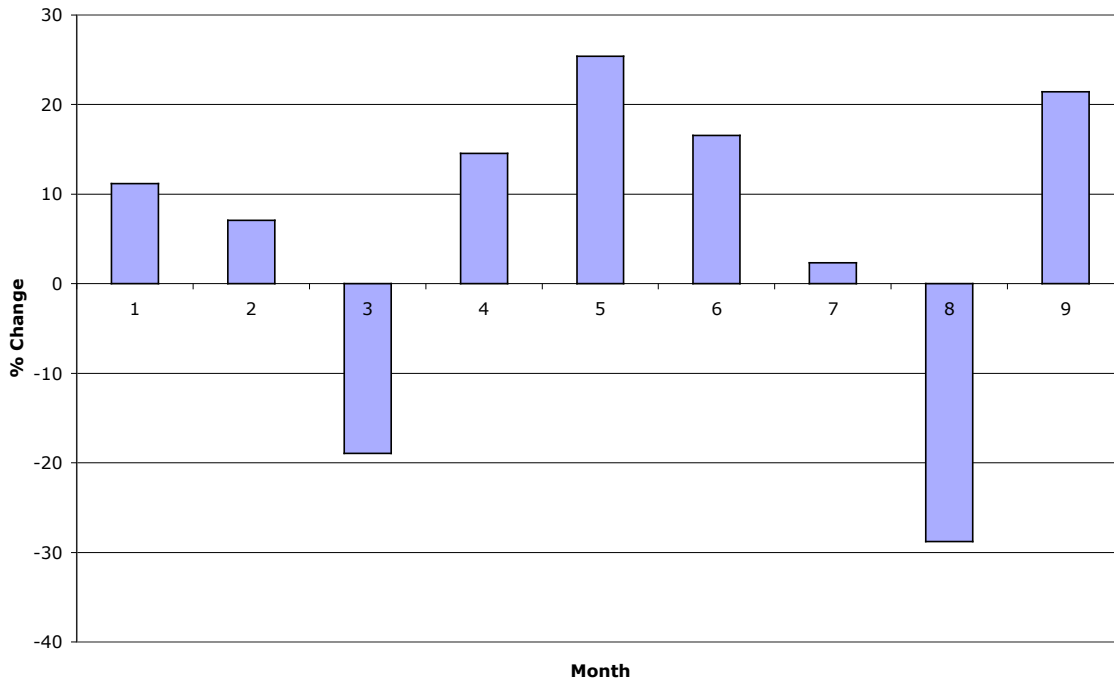**Month-on-Month % Changes, April 2005-January 2006**

Chart 3: Month-on-month changes, nsdl.org

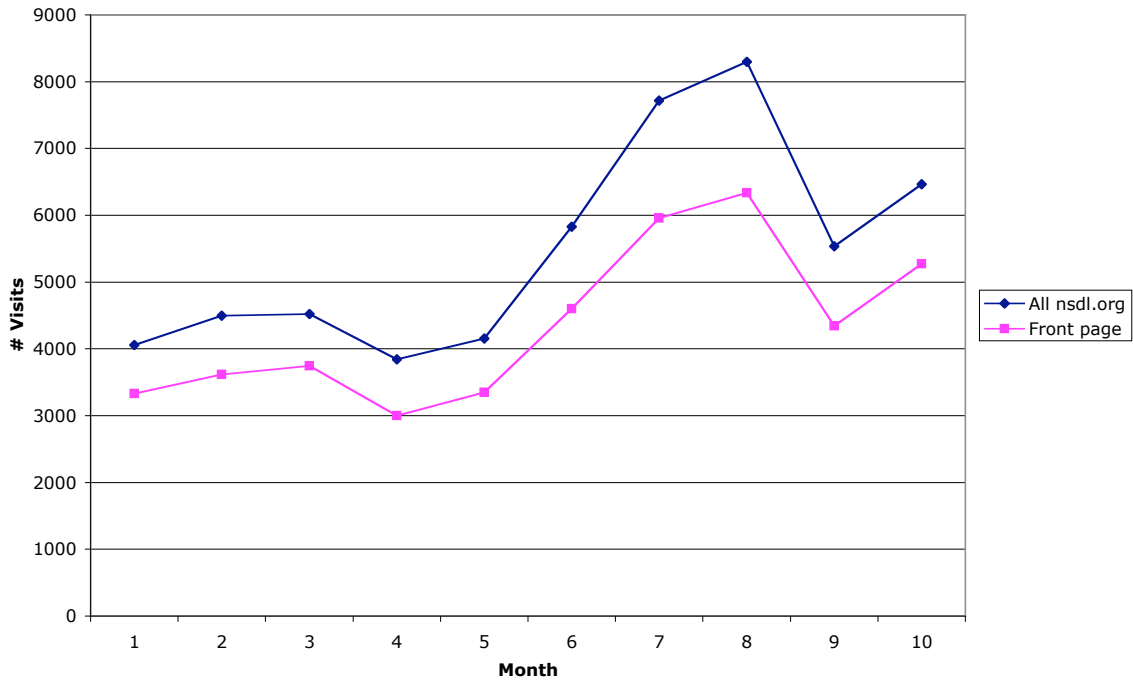**Sticky Visits, April 2005-January 2006**

Chart 4a: Sticky visits to nsdl.org, April 2005-January 2006
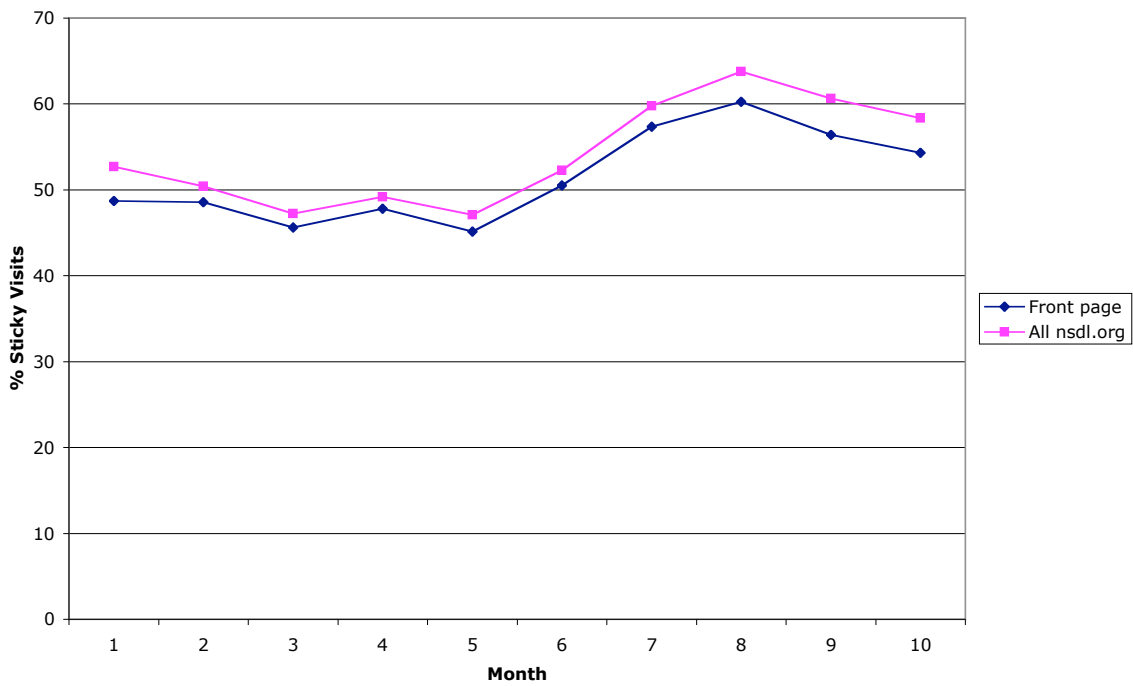
% Sticky Visits, Apr 05–Jan 06

Chart 4b: Sticky visits to nsdl.org, April 2005-January 2006, as % of overall visits

2 Privacy Policies

Each project that adds Omniture web metrics to their site needs to account for their use of Omniture in their site privacy policy. Rather than each project providing differing individual accounts of Omniture use, it is preferable to have a consistent account presented by all projects. As was discussed at the last CI meeting in the context of 'Single Sign-on' (another NSDL technology that will require a uniform privacy policy across the projects that adopt it), I, Jim Burger and Eileen McIlvain are working to develop a set of recommendations for standard privacy policies across nsdl.org, the Pathways, and partner projects such as DLESE.

Existing NSDL project privacy policies vary widely in length, content, topic, coverage, web accessibility, language accessibility, etc. There is no such thing as a 'standard' privacy policy amongst NSDL projects. We have been reviewing the state, range and intent of existing NSDL privacy policies, looking for common themes and best practices, and paying attention to the need for such policies to address web metrics, user registration, personalized accounts, the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), and compliance with court orders.

With regard to projects' use of web metrics and Omniture, we are working on a set of boilerplate sub-clauses covering web metrics that can be adopted by individual projects. This would require the relevant projects to describe their use of Omniture, yet at the same time leave these projects free to adopt other forms of web metrics as well (such as keeping server logs).

In the case of Pathways projects, making the adoption of these sub-clauses a condition of the MoU might be a suitable strategy to foster adoption consistently across NSDL.

Draft Requirements for web metrics sub-clauses for NSDL Pathways' and projects' privacy policies [1]

This is a working list of possible sub-clauses covering web metrics and Omniture adoption and operation, that individual projects could incorporate into their privacy policies. Any comments/input on these categories would be most welcome.

Introduction
- Rationale for collecting web metrics (to improve services, usability)
- Statement that first-party web metrics are being collected
- Statement that Omniture web metrics are being collected
- Statement that other third party web metrics are being collected (if required)

First party metrics
- Log transactions will be statistically aggregated
- Individual transaction logs will be discarded after aggregation has taken place
- IP addresses will be discarded after aggregation has taken place
- No back-ups of IP address information will be kept
- Aggregated information will not be traceable to an IP address
- Aggregated information will not be shared with third parties
- Some aggregated information may be published
- Transaction logs and aggregated information will be made available in response to court orders
- List of metrics retained (e.g.):
    o time of visit
    o date of visit
    o referring domains
    o search engine referrals
    o search engine terms
    o pages viewed
    o browser type
    o browser size
    o browser plug ins

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[1] It is assumed that all projects will collect at least their own and Omniture web metrics.

- o monitor settings
- o operating system
- o etc.

Omniture metrics
- Brief explanation of how Omniture works (java script)
- Omniture will discard IP addresses after aggregation has taken place
- Retained information will not be traceable to an IP address
- Retained information will not be shared with third parties
    - by Omniture
    - by project
    - by CI
    - Aggregate information may be published
    - Omniture data will be made available by Omniture in response to court orders (tbc)
    - List of metrics retained

Other third party metrics
[necessary where site in question contracts third party metrics apart from Omniture)
- Brief explanation of how third party web metrics work
- Third party will discard IP addresses after aggregation has taken place
- Retained information will not be traceable to an IP address
- Retained information will not be shared with third parties
- by third party
- by project
- Aggregate information may be published
- Third party data will be made available by third party in response to court orders (tbc)
- List of metrics retained