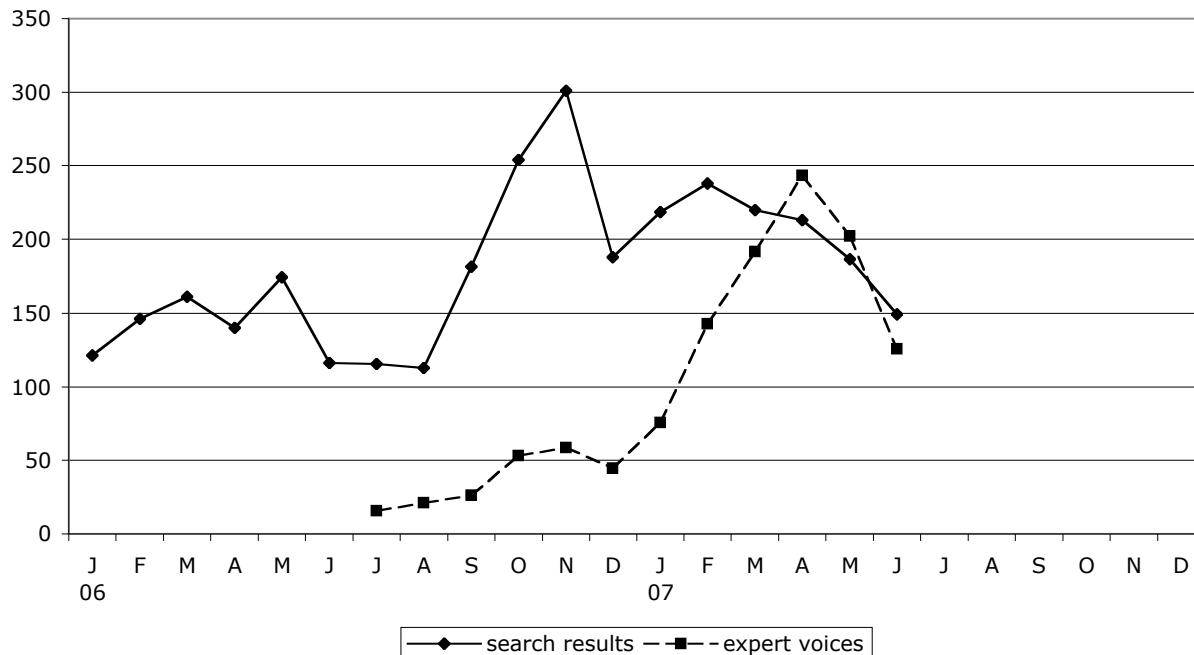


NSDL SNAPSHOT, JUNE 2007: GROWING USE OF EXPERT VOICES

Visitors per day, 2006-2007



This snapshot report illustrates the increase in use of Expert Voices during the first half of 2007.

The chart compares the average numbers of daily visitors who perform a search on nsdl.org, and the average number who visit the Expert Voices blog. These are not exclusive behaviours and some visitors may do both things during the same visit.

The chart shows that use of Expert Voices increased during Spring 2007. During April and May, more visitors visited the Expert Voices site than viewed a search results page on nsdl.org. As has been noted in previous usage reports, much of this increased use was a result of EV being used as a class blog for the 'Cornell Info 204 – Networks' class run by David Easley and Jon Kleinberg.¹

Search vs. blogging: Different tasks for different users

An interesting question raised by this analysis concerns the different types of user behaviour that may be inferred from these data. NSDL webmetrics assume that a visit to nsdl.org represents an attempt by a user to complete a task. How might searching tasks and Expert Voices tasks differ? Research from user testing, and click logs of the nsdl.org front page, suggests that when users perform a search, they want to enter a search term, go to the search results page, select a search result, and then click on a link and leave the site. The figures for the search results page probably reflect therefore *many* users each attempting a relatively *short-term* task. Conversely, the figures for the Expert Voices blog, when triangulated with other webmetrics, suggest that this traffic is being generated by a *small* number of users (the members of a class) engaged in a *long-term* task (participation in a semester-long class blog).

¹ Course web site: <http://www.infosci.cornell.edu/courses/info204/2007sp/>

Similar levels of traffic are therefore being generated by two groups of users that differ widely in size, task orientation, group cohesiveness, behaviour, etc. These differences have important consequences for how impact might be measured. Is it even possible to compare the 'impact' of finding a just-in-time teaching resource, to the 'impact' of participating in a course blog for several months?

Conversion and fall-out statistics

The statistics reported in the above chart are examples of 'conversion' statistics.

Conversion statistics measure the numbers and proportions of all visitors to a website who make it through to a desired page in that website. In the case of commercial websites, the desired page might be a page where a visitor purchases an item. Sites looking to maximize their revenue would want to maximize their conversion rate: that is, in order to maximize their sales, they would want to have as many people as possible click on a 'buy' button.

'Conversion' is closely related to 'fall-out' (i.e. the numbers of visitors who *fail* to reach a specific page. Calculated as a percentage, fall-out = 100 – conversion (see Figure below). If a site is interested in maximizing their conversion rates, they should also therefore be interested in minimizing their fall-out rates.

Conversion and Fall-out Summary

Conversion % Summary



Fall-out % Summary



Conversion Rate + Fall-out Rate = 100%

While NSDL does not 'sell' products, conversion and fall-out rates are still useful statistics. For instance, user studies and other data that show that a popular activity for NSDL users is to search for educational resources. Conversion rates can then be used to see how many users actually manage to achieve this goals (the answer, as shown in the above chart, is 150-200 visitors per day).

Note

The basic unit of analysis described here is the 'visit.' For statistical purposes, a visit begins when a person first views a page on nsdl.org and ends after activity ceases for 30 minutes. It is assumed that each visit represents an attempt by a user to complete a task on nsdl.org. For more information, including the differences between visits, page views, and hits, see 'Introduction to NSDL Webmetrics,' http://eval.comm.nsdl.org/docs/06_webmetrics_intro.pdf.