

- » Understanding the difference between monitoring and measuring
- » Setting up your measurement plan
- » Selecting analytics packages that meet your marketing objectives
- » Learning to use Google Analytics
- » Discovering Google Social Analytics

Chapter 1

Delving into Data

Web analytics is the practice of analyzing performance and business statistics for a website, social media marketing, and other online marketing efforts to better understand user behavior and improve results. Some might call web analytics more art than science; to others, it's black magic.

The amount of data that can be acquired from online marketing efforts vastly exceeds the amount available using traditional offline methods. That statement alone makes online marketing, including social media, an attractive form of public relations and advertising.

In the best of all possible worlds, the results of your marketing efforts should appear as increased profits — in other words, as an improved bottom line with a nice return on investment (ROI). You're more likely to achieve this goal if you make analytics part of a process of continuous quality improvement.



TIP

Before getting mired in the swamp of online marketing data, assess the performance of your hub website. If you aren't making a profit from that core investment, it doesn't matter whether you fill the conversion funnel (see Book 1, Chapter 1) with fantastic traffic from social media, exhibit a soaring click-through rate, or tally revenues through the roof. If you aren't sure how your hub site is performing, use the tools in this chapter and ask your web developer and bookkeeper for help.

Planning a Measurement Strategy

The basic principle “You can’t manage what you don’t measure” applies doubly to the online universe. Do you know whether Facebook or LinkedIn drives more traffic to your site? Whether more people buy after reading a blog post about pets than after reading a blog post about plants? If not, you’re simply guessing at how to expend your precious marketing dollars and time.

To make the most of your effort, return to the goals and objectives you established on your Social Media Marketing Goals statement (see Book 1, Chapter 1 or download it from www.dummies.com/go/socialmediamarketingaio5e).

Ask yourself what you need to measure to determine your accomplishments. Would interim measurements help you decide whether a particular aspect of a social media campaign is working?

For example, if one of your goals is to substitute social media marketing for paid advertising, compare performance between the two. If you initiated social media activities to improve a ranking on search engine results pages (SERPs), you must measure your standing by keywords at different times. In either case, of course, you might want to track visitors to the site who arrive from either a social media referral or from natural search to see whether they continue to a purchase.

Fortunately, computers do one thing extremely well: count. Chances are good that if you have a question, you can find an answer.



WARNING

Because computers count just about everything, you can quickly drown in so much data that you find it impossible to gather meaningful information, let alone make a decision. The last thing you need is a dozen reports that you don’t have time to read.

Unless you have a very large site, monitoring statistics monthly is usually sufficient. You might check more often when you first initiate a specific social media campaign or another online marketing activity, if you invest significant amounts of money or effort into a new campaign, or if you support your site by way of advertising (in which case, monitoring traffic is the sine qua non of your existence).



REMEMBER

In your Social Media Marketing Plan (see Book 1, Chapter 3, or download it from www.dummies.com/go/socialmediamarketingaio5e, add your choice of measurement parameters and analytical tools, as well as the names of the people who will be responsible for creating reports. Schedule the frequency of analytical review on your Social Media Activity Calendar (see Book 1, Chapter 4).

Monitoring versus measuring

For the purposes of this book, we discuss only quantitative data as part of the measurement process. Use monitoring tools to review such qualitative data from social media as

- » The degree of customer engagement
- » The nature of customer dialog, sometimes called sentiment
- » Your brand reputation on a social network
- » The quality of relationships with your target market
- » The extent of participation in online conversations
- » Positioning in your industry versus your competitors

If you have no monitoring tools in place yet, turn to Book 2, Chapter 1.



REMEMBER

“Real people” usually review subjective monitoring data to assess such ineffable qualities as the positive or negative characteristics of consumer posts, conversational tone, and brand acknowledgment. Notwithstanding Hal in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, we don’t yet have analytical software with the supple linguistic sophistication of the human brain.

Setting aside the squishy qualitative data, you still have two types of quantitative data to measure:

- » **Internal performance measurements:** Measure the effectiveness of your social media, other marketing efforts, and website in achieving your objectives. Performance measurements include such parameters as traffic to your social pages or website, the number of people who click through to your hub presence, which products sell best, and *conversion rate*, or the percentage of visitors who buy or become qualified leads.
- » **Business measurements:** Primarily dollar-based parameters — costs, revenues, profits — that go directly to your business operations. Such financial items as the cost of customer or lead acquisition, average dollar value per sale, the value assigned to leads, the break-even point, and ROI fall into this category. For more about measuring ROI, see Book 1, Chapter 2.

Deciding what to measure

Most of the key performance indicators (KPIs) and business criteria you measure fall into one of the following categories:

- » **Traffic:** You must know the number and nature of visitors to any of the sites that are part of your web presence.
- » **Leads:** Business-to-business (B2B) companies, service professionals, and companies that sell expensive, complex products often close their sales offline. Online efforts yield prospects, many of whom — you hope — will become qualified leads as they move down the conversion funnel.
- » **Financials:** Costs, sales, revenue, and profits are the essential components of business success. Analytics let you track which sales arrive from which sources and how much revenue they generate.
- » **Search marketing:** As discussed in Book 2, Chapter 3, optimizing social media can improve visibility in search engine results. Not only do many social media sites appear in search results, but your hub site also gains valuable inbound links from direct and indirect referrals.
- » **Other business objectives:** You may need customized analytics to track goals and objectives that don't fall into the other categories.

Chapter 6 in this minibook discusses KPIs in depth.

Don't plan on flying to the moon based on the accuracy of any statistical web data. Definitions of parameters differ by tool. Does a new visitor session start after someone has logged off for 24 minutes or 24 hours? In addition, results in real-time tools sometimes oscillate unpredictably.



TIP

If a value differs from what you expected, try running your analytics again later or run them over a longer period to smooth out irregularities.

Relative numbers are more meaningful than absolute ones. Is your traffic growing or shrinking? Is your conversion rate increasing or decreasing? Focus on ratios or percentages to make the data more meaningful. Suppose that ten percent of a small number of viewers to your site converted to buyers before you started a blog, compared to only five percent of a larger number of viewers afterward. What does that tell you?

Most businesses measure the following:

- » Likes
- » Engagement

- » Followers growth
- » Traffic conversions
- » Social interactions
- » Social sentiment
- » Social visitor goals
- » Social shares
- » Social visitors conversion rates
- » Web visitors from social channels

You can find a lot of research about typical performance on different statistical parameters. Though it's nice to know industry averages for benchmarking purposes, the only statistics that matter are your own.



Regardless of how you go about the measurement process, you must define success before you begin. Without some sort of target value, you can't know whether you've succeeded. Keep your handy, dandy Social Media Marketing Goals statement (see Book 1, Chapter 1) accessible while you review this chapter.

A good measurement strategy determines how much data to leave out, as well as how much to measure. Unless you have a huge site or quite a complex marketing campaign, you can focus on just a few parameters.

Establishing responsibility for analytics

Chances are good that your business isn't large enough to field an entire team whose sole responsibility is statistical analysis. Even if you aren't running an employment agency for statisticians, you can still take a few concrete steps to ensure that the right data is collected, analyzed, and acted on:

1. Ask your marketing person (is that you?) to take responsibility for defining what needs to be measured based on business objectives.

Consult with your financial advisor, if necessary.

2. Have your programmer, web developer, or go-to IT person select and install the analytics tools that will provide the data you need.

Make ease of use, flexibility, and customizability important factors in the decision.

3. If a *dashboard* (a graphical executive summary of key data) isn't part of the analytical package, ask your IT person to set one up.

Try the Google Analytics dashboard (see Figure 1-1) or the HubSpot dashboard for multiple media (see Figure 1-2). Dashboards display essential results quickly, preferably over easy-to-change timeframes of your choice.

FIGURE 1-1:
A typical Google Analytics dashboard displays key web statistics.

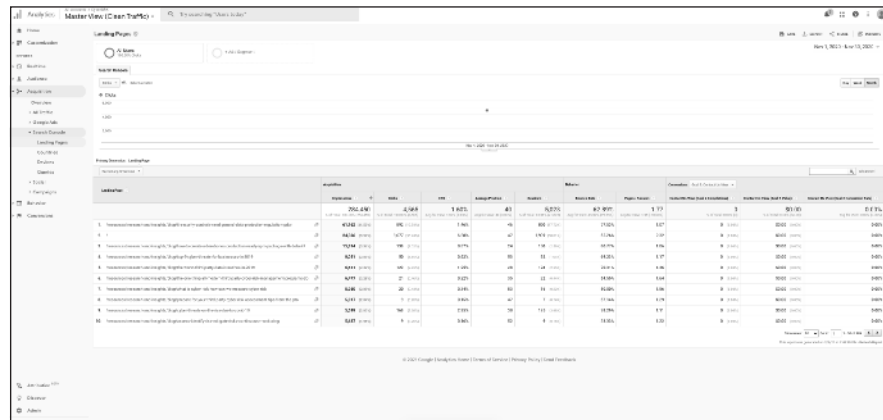
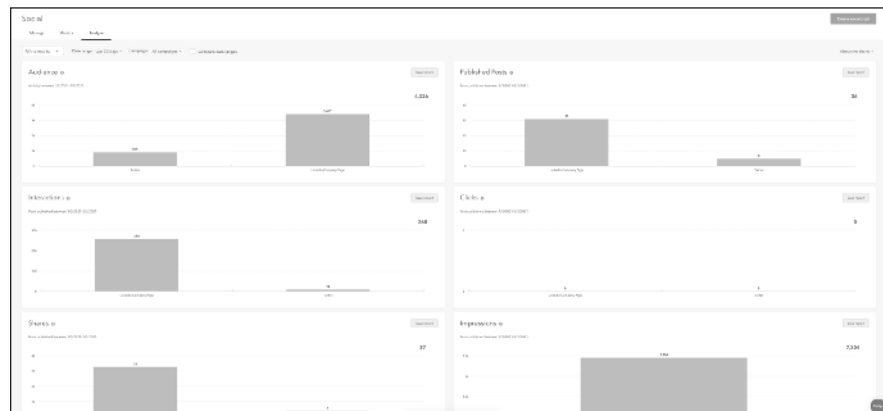


FIGURE 1-2:
A HubSpot page showing details about social media activity.



4. Let your marketing, IT, and content management folks work together to finalize the highest priority pages (usually landing pages and pages within your conversion funnels). When possible, set up tracking codes for links coming from social marketing pages. IT should test to ensure that the data collection system works and adjust it as needed.

5. Your marketing person can be responsible for regularly monitoring the results, adjusting marketing campaigns, and reporting to you and other stakeholders. Have your IT person validate the data and audit tracking tags at least twice a year — they can easily get out of sync.
6. Always integrate the results of your social media and online marketing efforts with offline marketing and financial results for a complete picture of what's happening with your business. Compare against your business goals and objectives and modify as needed.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Aggregate all analytics in one place. You're unlikely to find a premade dashboard that includes everything you need to measure for your specific campaigns. Your programmer may have to export data into Excel, PDF, or email format; save it all in one place; and then build a custom spreadsheet to generate combined reports for your review.

Selecting Analytics Packages

Ask your developer or web host which statistical packages are available for your site. Unless you have a fairly large site or need real-time data, one of the free packages in Table 1-1 should work well. Review your choices to select the best fit for your needs. In many cases, Google Analytics is the best answer.



WARNING

If your developer or web host tells you that you don't need statistics, find another provider. It's nearly impossible to measure success without easy access to statistics.

The specific suite of statistical results that a package offers may influence your choice of tools. Unfortunately, you can't count on getting comparable results when you mix and match different tools. Each one defines parameters differently (for example, what constitutes a repeat visitor). Consequently, you need to watch trends, not absolute numbers.

If you have a large site with heavy traffic or extensive reporting requirements, free packages — even Google Analytics — might not be enough. You can find dozens of paid statistical programs in an online search; Table 1-2 lists nine of them. Several are fairly inexpensive, but the ones marked *enterprise-level solution* in the Cost column of Table 1-2 can escalate into real money.



REMEMBER

Not all marketing channels use the same yardstick — nor should they. Your business objectives drive your choice of channels and therefore your choice of yardsticks.

TABLE 1-1 **Free Analytics Packages**

Name	URL	Notes
AFS Analytics	https://www.afsanalytics.com	Graphical display; real-time, adjustable timeframe
AWStats	http://awstats.org	Log analysis tool
Clicky	http://clicky.com	All the basics for a single website; 3,000 daily page view max; offers paid options
eXTReMe Tracking	http://extremetracking.com/?free	Free version limited to one tracker on one page per site
GoingUp!	www.goingup.com/features	Customizable dashboard with graphs and charts
Google Analytics	https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/analytics	Can include social media
Matomo	https://matomo.org	Open-source analytics
StatCounter	www.statcounter.com	Accepts and analyzes traffic from many blogs and other social networking websites
Webalizer	www.webalizer.org	Simple graphical display that works well with small sites

Some paid statistical packages are hosted on a third-party server. Others are designed for installation on your own server. Generally, higher-end paid statistical solutions offer several benefits:

- » Real-time analytics (no waiting for results)
- » Sophisticated reporting tools by domain or across multiple domains, departments, or enterprises
- » Customizable data-mining filters
- » Path-through-site analysis, tracking an individual user from entry to exit
- » Integrated traffic and store statistics
- » Integrated qualitative and quantitative analytics for multiple social media services
- » Analysis of downloaded PDF, video, audio, or another file type
- » Mapping host addresses to company names and details
- » Clickstream analysis to show which sites visitors arrive from and go to

TABLE 1-2 **Paid Statistical Packages**

Name	URL	Cost
Adobe Analytics	www.adobe.com/solutions/digital-analytics.html	Enterprise-level solution; includes social media.
Chartbeat	http://chartbeat.com	Starting at \$9.95 for standard real-time web analytics for five sites.
Clicky	http://clicky.com/compare	Paid options start at \$79.99/yr for 1 million page views/month.
eXTReMe Tracking	http://extremetracking.com	\$4.50 per month for 100,000 page views/month.
Hootsuite	https://hootsuite.com/products/insights	Prices start at \$29/month and go up to \$600/month.
Sawmill LITE	www.sawmill.net/lite.html	Lite version \$99 for one profile; \$199 for five profiles. Professional level starts at \$199; Enterprise level starts at \$599 based on the number of profiles.
Upsight	www.upsight.com	Omni-channel analytics. Enterprise-level priced on custom basis.
Webtrends Social Measurement	http://webtrends.com	Enterprise-level solution; includes social media.
Woopra	www.woopra.com	Starts at \$1,000 per month. Also has a free version.



REMEMBER

Don't collect information for information's sake. Stop when you have enough data to make essential business decisions.

Reviewing analytical options for social media

Depending on what you're trying to measure, you may need data from some of the analytical tools available internally from a particular social media channel or statistics from social bookmarking sites such as AddToAny (www.addtoany.com) or from URL shorteners, which we discuss in the following section.

Table 1-3 summarizes which social media services integrate with Google Analytics for traffic monitoring and which also offer their own internal performance statistics. See Chapters 2 through 5 in this minibook for a detailed discussion of analytics on specific social media services.

TABLE 1-3

Analytics for Specific Social Networks

Website	URL	Integrates with Google Analytics?	Own Analytics Package?
Facebook Page Insights	www.facebook.com/help/336893449723054	Yes	Yes
LinkedIn Analytics Tab	www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/4499	Yes	Yes
Meetup Group Stats	https://help.meetup.com/hc/en-us/articles/360002862532-How-do-I-see-my-Meetup-group-s-stats-	Yes	Yes
Twitter Analytics	https://analytics.twitter.com	Yes	Yes
YouTube Analytics	www.youtube.com/analytics	Yes	Yes (must have an account with a channel)



REMEMBER

Register for free optional statistics whenever you can.

Selecting a URL-shortening tool for statistics

One type of free optional statistics tool is particularly handy: traffic generated by shortened URLs, as described in Book 2, Chapter 1. Be sure to select a free shortener that offers analytics, such as the following:

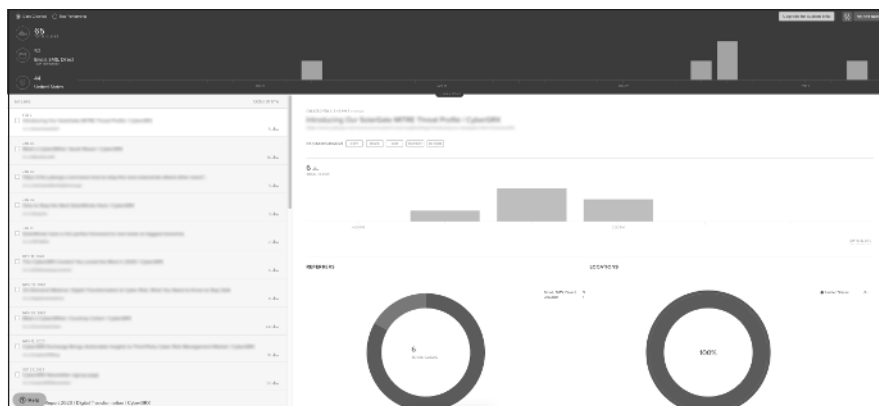
- » **Bitly** (<http://bitly.com>): A free account (registration required) to track statistics from shortened links (Figure 1-3)
- » **Rebrandly** (www.rebrandly.com): Free and paid accounts
- » **Ow.ly** (<https://hootsuite.com/pages/owly>): Hootsuite's free URL shortener
- » **TinyURL** (<https://tinyurl.com>): Lets you customize the back end of the shortened URL



TIP

You can use a dashboard tool such as Netvibes to see all your stats in one convenient place. See Book 1, Chapter 4 for more details about dashboards.

FIGURE 1-3:
Bitly offers
several displays
for traffic
statistics.



Getting Started with Google Analytics

Google Analytics is so popular that it justifies some additional discussion. This free, high-quality analytics tool works well for most website owners. It now incorporates many social media services as part of its analysis and scales well from tiny sites to extremely large ones.



TIP

Start with the free Google Analytics and switch to an enterprise-level solution when and if your web effort demands it.

Among its many advantages, Google Analytics offers

- » More in-depth analysis than most other free statistical packages
- » Plenty of support, as shown in Table 1-4
- » Easy-to-set specific timeframes to compare results to other years
- » Many of the more sophisticated features of expensive software, such as path-through-site information
- » Customization of the dashboard display
- » Conversion funnel visualization, shown in Figure 1-4
- » Analysis by *referrer* (where traffic to your site has linked from) or search term
- » Tracking of such key performance indicators as returning visitors and *bounce rate* (percentage of visitors who leave without visiting a second page)

- » Customizable reports to meet your needs that you can have emailed automatically to you
- » Social analytics capabilities
- » Seamless integration with Google Ads

TABLE 1-4 **Helpful Google Analytics Resource URLs**

Name	URL	Description
"Google Analytics Tricks & Tips in 2020"	https://blog.advesa.com/marketing/google-analytics-tricks	Useful Google Analytics tips and tricks
About Social Analytics	https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1683971?hl=en&ref_topic=1316551	Guide to the features of Google's social media tools
Analytics Academy	https://analytics.google.com/analytics/academy	Google Analytics Academy courses
Analytics Help Center	https://support.google.com/analytics/?hl=en#topic=3544906	Google Analytics support
Google Analytics Products	https://www.blog.google/products/marketingplatform/analytics	Google blog for all things analytics
"How to Prepare for Google Analytics IQ"	https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/3424288?hl=en	Online Google Analytics training
Create, edit, and share goals	https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1032415	Setting up goals
The Ultimate Guide to Google Analytics Resources	https://neilpatel.com/blog/google-analytics-resources	Collection of Google Analytics guides



TECHNICAL
STUFF

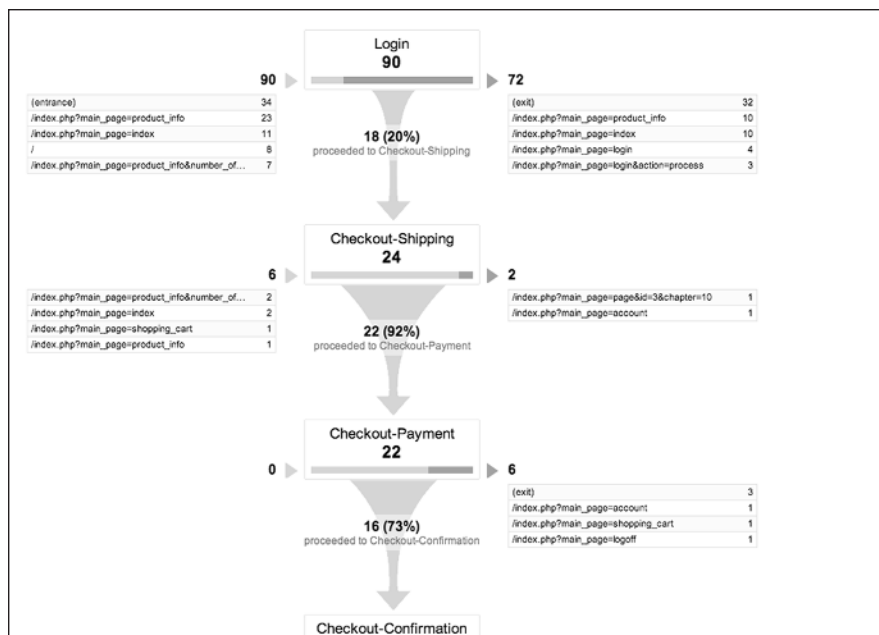
Google provides steps for installing Analytics at <https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/analytics>. This task definitely isn't for anyone who is faint-of-programming heart. Get help from your developer. For detailed information on installing Google Analytics, refer to the help sites listed in Table 1-4 or go to <https://support.google.com/analytics/?hl=en#topic=3544906>.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

You must tag each page of your website with a short piece of JavaScript. The tagging task isn't difficult. If your site uses a template or a common server-side include (for example, for a footer), you place the Analytics code once, and it appears on all pages. You should start seeing results within 24 hours.

FIGURE 1-4:
A sample
conversion
funnel for Google
Analytics.



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Integrating Google's Social Media Analytics

You can still identify traffic arriving at your site from social media services simply by looking at All Referrers under Acquisition in your Google Analytics account. However, Google's Social Media Analytics makes it much easier to integrate statistical results from social media services into your reports and to assess the business value of social media. Take advantage of the Social option to pre-filter for social-site referrers only.

Start by clicking Acquisition in the left navigation, as usual. Then click again to expand the Social option, as shown in Figure 1-5, and select Network Referrals. As shown in Figure 1-5, Google Social Analytics compares sessions from social media to all sessions in the graphs and lists traffic from individual social media sources below the graphs.

Alternatively, below the Social options in the left navigation, click Users Flow. In the Select Segment drop-down list (at the top of the Social Users Flow page), select Referral Traffic. The resulting display, shown in Figure 1-6, appears.

FIGURE 1-5:
The Social section of Google Analytics makes it easy to collect and compare referrals from social networks.

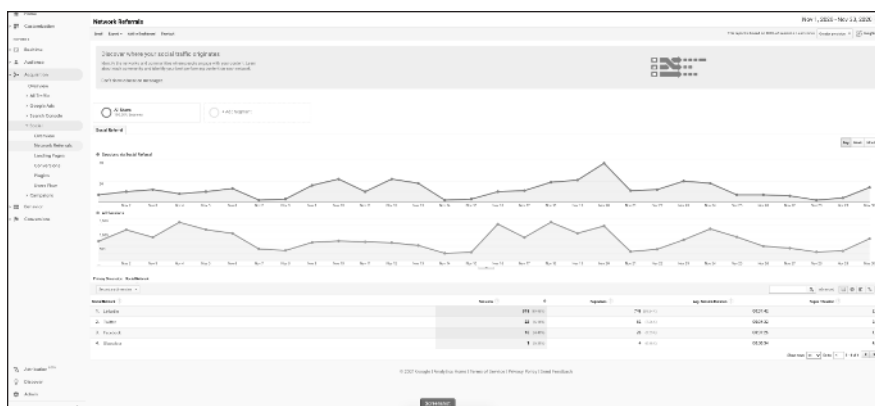
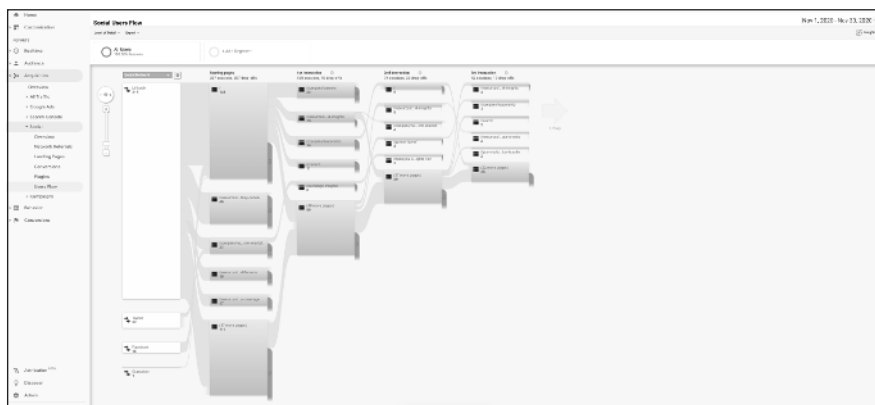


FIGURE 1-6:
The Social Users Flow page displays the path taken by visitors who arrive at your site from various social media.



Some social media services, such as Facebook, make it easy to integrate their data with Google Analytics by enabling you to place Google Analytics tracking code on your social media pages. Of course, Google-owned Blogger, and YouTube, as well as the RSS service FeedBurner, are already compatible with Analytics.



REMEMBER



TIP

Web analytics, from Google or anywhere else, are valuable only if you use them to improve users' experience on your site and your bottom line.

The URLs for funnel and goal pages don't need to have identical domain names, as long as the correct tracking code appears on the pages. The thank-you page for a purchase is sometimes on a third-party storefront, for example. Or perhaps you want to track how many people go from a particular page on your main website to post a comment on one of your social network sites or blog.