**Guest blog post for Elizabeth Spann Craig 22/12/14**

**How’s your blog doing? Top 5 things to measure and why**

Are you a blogger who likes to stay on top of blog statistics? Do you regularly check which sites are sending you traffic, or which posts are the most popular? Do the stats affect the decisions you make about your blog?

For professional bloggers, monitoring the numbers is crucial – they need to know what’s working in order to do more of the same, and not waste time on blog posts and blog content that isn’t ultimately earning them money.

However, not everyone takes a systematic approach to measuring their blog’s performance. Most of us get excited to see visitor numbers rise, or a particular post get a lot of comments. Positive statistics can be encouraging. But monitoring the stats can easily become either addictive (checking too often and stressing about it) or overwhelming (what to do with all these numbers, and what do they mean?)

Blogging platforms come with their own proprietary stats. And if you have Google Analytics installed, you could spend all day crunching the numbers and building pie charts. But it’s good to remember that “not everything that can be counted, counts”. If you’re a blogger who wants to build and maintain a readership, but would rather not spend too long analyzing the stats, it pays to know which numbers are worth monitoring, and which are less significant.

**1) Visitor numbers**

Most blog stats packages will tell you numbers of both Views and Visitors. The one to take note of is Visitors, which corresponds to unique visits. Don’t feel you have to measure up to some perfect number. The thing to do is to monitor these numbers over time. You want them to be rising generally, month on month or year on year. If you have a spike in numbers, look to see what caused it – maybe your blog post was shared by someone influential on social media and generated a load of clicks, or maybe your blog was mentioned on a big media site or in the national press. Quiet days or even weeks are normal. But if Visitor numbers are trending down, that’s when you might wonder why. Have you been blogging less frequently? Gone off topic? How could your blog be more engaging?

2 images: views-visitors.jpg & views-visitors-old-style.jpg

Caption:

The new style WordPress stats page separates Views from Visitors on different tabs, whereas in the old style shows them together, which I think is actually clearer.

**2) Referrers**

When visitors arrive at your blog via a link from another blog or website those sites are recorded as ‘Referrers’. Look for any patterns. Does Facebook or Twitter send a lot of traffic? It’s a sign your blog posts are being shared there, which in itself is a sign of endorsement. It’s also a good indicator of where your readers (and potential readers) hang out. If you see another blog or site regularly referring visitors, find out more about that site – it could be a blog you should read or comment on. It may even be a potential blogging buddy.

**3) Top Posts & Pages**

This tells you what content people are attracted to. If you notice particular types of blog posts always do well, for example, ‘how to’ posts with lots of screen shots, you might want to produce more like that. However, this isn’t the same as ‘most commented on’. Just because a page or post gets a high number of visitors, it doesn’t necessarily mean that’s your most engaging content.

image: most-commented.jpg

Caption:

Knowing which of your posts are the most commented on can help identify popular topics. You might also want to highlight your most popular posts as ‘sticky’, as a way of guiding new visitors to your best content.

**4) Most-Commented-on Posts or Pages**

In WordPress, go to ‘Comments – By Posts & Pages’ to see a list of your most commented-on content. High numbers of comments is a good indication of content that readers enjoy (or maybe find contentious) and discussions they want to participate in. Commenting requires time and energy, more so than just ‘liking’ a post. Plus, motivated commenters often become subscribers. Knowing which posts are generating the most interest and discussion helps you decide what to blog about, if you ever have that problem!

**5) Subscribers**

Of course, we all want blog subscribers, because it makes it all feel worthwhile. But, as with visitor numbers, look at this over time and don’t worry about reaching unrealistic goals. Quality counts, not quantity. From the point of view of capturing the genuinely interested folks, you’d do better to monitor the growth of your email list. Unlike a blog, email allows you to ‘push’ messages to your fans, should you wish to do that occasionally.

Once you’re focused on the stats that are the most meaningful, you might want to set yourself a schedule for monitoring, so that you don’t spend too long on it. If you’re posting once or twice a week, there shouldn’t be any need to check the stats more than once a week, maybe even less often. The trick is to enjoy your blogging, learn from the numbers but not become a slave to them.