

## Tracking online to offline: bridging the great divide

More companies are taking notice of the potential for tracking marketing response online. It is easy to track metrics such as page views, ranking and click throughs. But a fundamental function of websites – actually getting people to pick up the phone and call – is often forgotten.

This gap between on- and offline is not impossible to cross, and the more savvy marketing directors are beginning to take notice of this important metric.



This white paper suggests two strategies for tracking offline conversions; while both have their uses, one method is more reliable than the other: the strategic use of Inbound numbers.

### Testing online

Any marketer will tell you that testing is the golden rule for every element of your marketing mix. You need to obtain hard facts about what is working and what isn't. And, as the marketing environment is always changing, you need to keep testing. If you don't, you will probably be wasting both money and valuable opportunities.

Marketing success online is usually tested by measuring *conversions* – a conversion, basically, is successfully convincing an individual to do what you want them to do. From a website, for example, this could be a sale, lead, or subscription. If two unique visitors arrive at a retail website and one makes a purchase, the retailer has achieved one conversion. You can analyse this data to discover what made one visitor convert and the other leave, and use this information to push more conversions.

Testing conversions online can be done in many ways. There are tools and code available to measure click throughs, page impressions, subscriptions, traffic, and even the effects of multiple variations of the same page (multivariate testing). Social media has recently exploded, and though the experts are still arguing about how to make the most of this as a marketing resource, there is little doubt about its potential.

Internet marketers are constantly stressing the need for testing online conversions. But concentrating only on online conversions is ignoring a fundamental and important fact: **63% of website conversions are completed offline.**

## Offline conversions

In 2006, comScore released a study showing that only 37% of conversions from websites were completed online. The majority of conversions that began on the internet were completed either in retail stores or over the phone. It is important to understand this when marketing online. The internet, for many, is a place for gathering information before talking to a 'real' person or going into a 'real' store.



This is often a trust issue. When a website does not provide an easy method of personal contact (and many people do not consider email personal), visitors are inclined to distrust them and look for a competitor who is willing to actually talk. A conversation with a real person is reassuring for the customer, not to mention an opportunity for the company to make recommendations or up sell.

Many businesses prefer to do business this way. Their website may even be set up for the express purpose of convincing website visitors to call. This is particularly true of any business whose product or service involves explanations, tailored quotes or contracts.

While this method of conversion can be very effective, it presents a problem for marketers. These offline conversions (beginning online, completed offline) are difficult to track and measure. How can you tell which part of the website they looked at before calling? Did they find the website through Google or a referral? The answers to these questions are invaluable to marketers planning future campaigns.

There are two simple methods of finding these answers:

### 1. Ask your callers

This is the traditional method used for many years and across all industries. Ask your callers how they found you, where they looked, or what they read.

There are some serious shortcomings to this method, however. Many callers don't remember or (more accurately), don't care. They want the focus to be on them, not your market research. For this reason, and others, the sales consultants are reluctant to ask and often forget. If they are forced, they may even make up the results.

The resulting data, therefore, can be highly questionable. If you care about accurate results, you may want to try another method.

### 2. Inbound numbers

Inbound numbers (numbers beginning in 1300 or 1800) are paid for, wholly or partially, by the owner of the number (the business). It is therefore easy to keep track of how many times these numbers have been called.

By purchasing several Inbound numbers, you can use them to keep track of the efficacy of your marketing campaigns. For example, a different phone number for your email campaigns, special promotions and landing pages would let you know which of these is working for you, and which may need to be reviewed.

Another reason for using Inbound numbers is that they will increase the incentive for customers to call; 1800 numbers are free for the caller, and 1300 numbers are the cost of a local call from anywhere in Australia.

## **Case Study: How one company increased sales by 40% while reducing their marketing spend**

Arrow Voice & Data are a business telecommunications company that deals in contracts and specialised services tailored to each specific client. Over 90% of their sales are therefore completed over the phone. Their marketing budget was spread over Adwords, email campaigns, direct mail, Yellow Pages and updating their website.

Many of their customers looked at their website before telephoning them, but they didn't know how many, and whether their other advertising was working. Though sales were good, the Marketing Director wanted to focus his efforts on the marketing methods that worked best.

To find out what these were, they decided to use the potential of their own product: Inbound numbers. They used a different number for each of their marketing methods – landing pages (for people arriving from pay-per-click campaigns), emails, direct mail brochures, and the home page of their website.

Arrow Voice & Data found that the number of phone calls from their direct mail campaigns did not justify the cost of sending them out. They also decided to cancel Yellow Pages and 'beef up' their email campaigns. They have fine tuned their marketing budget, at the same time increasing their sales from email.

The success of this strategy spurred them to go even further. They then used the multiple Inbound number concept by dividing their website into categories, each with different phone numbers. This strategy works well when a company sells a variety of products or services, or ones that can be logically categorised.

Through monitoring the number of calls from each category, they can tell which section of the website needs a review, and which is working well. This ongoing data leads them to keep updating their methods, and has increased their monthly sales by up to 40%.

## Uses for Inbound numbers

There are many potential uses for this method. Some companies have multiple websites, for example, information-based websites such as blogs and Wikis. Any enquiries that come off these websites should be treated differently to customers arriving from sales-based landing pages. Multiple numbers will help facilitate this.

You can test the efficacy of your directory listings by using different (trackable) numbers for your listings, or you can use different numbers on pages of your website to find out how much information people read before they contact you. It is important to do this in a logical manner, however, to avoid confusion.

## Regain your focus

Tracking your conversions, both offline and online, is absolutely essential. There are far too many companies that blindly throw money into marketing without considering if their methods are the best they can be.

One of the worst mistakes commonly made is trying to have a little bit of everything; it is far better to spend more money on two or three effective methods of marketing than piecing out small parts of the budget to eight or nine methods which may or may not work.

Testing is the key ingredient to marketing success; this includes online and offline conversions and every marketing campaign. No marketing should go untested. Even if your testing shows that your campaign is ineffective, you will be saving yourself money by preventing the same mistake happening again.

**Websalad is an Internet Marketing company that specialises in improving website performance and increasing visitor traffic.**

**You can reach them at**

[sales@websalad.com.au](mailto:sales@websalad.com.au)

**Or visit their website:**

[websalad.com.au](http://websalad.com.au)