Tracking your audience’s online motivations
(Written Oct 2014)

Summary
This resource will help you understand why tracking your audience’s online motivations is important and give you practical suggestions about how you can use online surveys effectively to explore these motivations within a logical research orientated methodology.

Introduction
Your website is a key online channel connecting you to with your audiences, but how much do you know about them? In particular do you know why your audiences visit your website? If you think you know, are you sure that your assumptions are correct and is your website meeting these needs? By applying the thinking contained in this resource you can begin to answer these questions.

Key learning outcomes
By consulting this resource, you will be able to
- Understand why tracking your audience’s online motivations is important
- Understand what existing thinking and research has been conducted in this area
- Apply a logical research orientated methodology when examining your audience’s motivations
- Understand how to choose and configure web survey tools to meet your purposes
- Understand how to explore web behaviours based on user motivations
- Learn about related insights from other cultural organisations.

Why is this important?
Digital change has altered the nature of a cultural organisation’s relationship with its audiences. This shift has provided audiences with more information, more choice and generally much more agency, leading to an emphasis on changing audience needs. Business models that could previously rely on being largely “supply-led” and look to link up with their audiences in linear established ways, now increasingly need to become more “demand-led”, in order to respond to these changing needs. Cultural organisations must respond to these needs not only within the physical space, but also online, and so understanding your audience online is crucial.

Your website is a key online channel connecting you to your audience. However this website is more than just a shop window to your organisation. It is instead a service, providing a series of functions that your audience desires to meet their needs. It could be the place where people go to book for an event, where they can research artists, subscribe to your newsletter, find out about jobs, view some artworks, plan their visit or find learning resources etc. To better understand the success of your website, you need to evaluate what these functions are, and to do that it is vital to understand why people want to visit it.

Web analytics tools (such as Google Analytics) are useful at helping you to track audience behaviour online (at least in respect of your website). However whilst web analytics data is good at telling you the “how”, it cannot tell you the “why” and capture audience motivation.
Being able to capture and track your audience’s online motivations will help you to fill in this gap and build a more complete picture of your audience’s needs.

**Who is this resource for?**

Whilst the practical tips within this resource will be of most use to staff with responsibilities connected to their organisation’s websites, the rationale underpinning (and explained within) the resource should be of use to anyone within a cultural organisation who is interested in building their audience insights.

Whilst much of the research upon which this resource is based derives from museum studies – the application of this learning can be applied to other cultural organisations, irrespective of type.

**What does existing thinking say?**

**Offline “real world” audiences**

Significant research carried out within Museum Visitor Studies challenged the traditional approach of many museums when seeking to understand their audiences, namely identifying and segmenting their audiences based on their demographics. A leading researcher in Museum Visitor Studies, John Falk, proposed that every visit to a museum was a unique, ephemeral experience defined by that person, their needs and agendas on that day, in that place and in that time, irrespective of demographics. He argued that visitors came in order to fulfil specific identity-related needs, which were multiple and not necessarily fixed. These identity-related needs could be understood by exploring the range of reasons why people chose to visit a museum on any given day.

From visitor surveys, his research identified five museum-specific identities reflecting visitor motivations. Each identity reflects different motivations for visiting the museum. Specifically:

1. **Explorers** are driven by their personal curiosity, their urge to discover new things.
2. **Facilitators** visit the museum on behalf of others’ special interests in the exhibition or the subject-matter of the museum.
3. **Experience seekers** are these visitors who desire to see and experience a place, such as tourists.
4. **Professional hobbyists** are those with specific knowledge in the subject matter of an exhibition and specific goals in mind.
5. **Rechargers** seek a contemplative or restorative experience, often to let some steam out of their systems.

**Application to online audiences**

Similarly, existing approaches of understanding online audiences are limited. Thinking about your online audiences merely as a set of fixed identities based on their demographics on lifestyle types

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1 This resource focuses specifically on how to think about and capture website motivations and does not extend to potential methodologies for capturing other online motivations such as via various social media channels, largely because there is no one clear approach that can be advocated for this.


such as MOSAIC profiles or Culture Segments is inadequate. These existing approaches have value as part of broader marketing strategies, but on their own are insufficient when thinking about an online relationship with audiences, where the same individuals can display a range of multiple behaviours and motivations. Understanding these is vital. Online behaviours can already be tracked via various web and social media analytics tools, but tracking online motivations is more challenging.

In the last few years, research\(^3\) has been carried out (again focussing on museums, but applicable more widely) that has sought to explore the online motivations behind audience’s visits to museums’ websites. This research was conducted using online surveys posted on websites. Online surveys, if utilised appropriately, represent an invaluable route to qualitatively understanding your audiences, particularly their motivations. These surveys asked website audiences to specify why they were visiting the website that day. The results were analysed and 5 broad categories of motivation were identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1. Visitors: Planning a visit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Researchers: Finding specific information for research or professional purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Personal hobbyists: Finding specific information for personal interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Browsers: Engaging in casual browsing without looking for something specific</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Buyers: Making a transaction on the website.</td>
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How can you apply this thinking to your organisation?

You can apply this thinking to your website by running similar online surveys that directly ask audiences why they have visited your website that day. Such surveys are generally easy to implement and are a great way of capturing direct and immediate information from the people who count – namely your audiences. However to maximise the value of running these surveys for the organisation, it is important not to approach this as a one off activity, but rather as part of a holistic and methodical research orientated approach.

We therefore recommend you adopt the following steps when focusing on this area. Each of these steps are described more fully in this context below:

1. **Scope** your questions

Before running such a survey it is important to go back to basics and ask the all important question “what is our website for?”

This will help you better understand the “functions” that audiences may require from your website and help you determine the *perceived* online motivations of your audiences. In order to answer this you may need to check back against your organisation’s mission as you website’s objectives should always look to support this mission in some way.

For example it could be to be to highlight events, it could be to support a real visit to the venue, it could be to engage audiences in your collection, it could be promote knowledge and learning about specific subjects or it could be some or all of these together.

Once you have done this, and depending on what you find out, you should either test your assumptions by scoping a question that allows audiences to self identify with pre existing motivational categories (the 5 online motivations outlined in the previous section are recommended). Alternatively if you are unsure you could pose a free- form response question that simply asks the audience to detail their reasons for visiting the website.

You may also decide to focus on one of the functions of your website and explore the more nuanced motivations that relate to this area. For example the Tate recently conducted online user motivation research related to why people used its online collections. They designed specific survey questions that focused on this area. For more information please see [http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/understanding-peoples-motivations-and-usage-online-collection](http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/blogs/understanding-peoples-motivations-and-usage-online-collection)
2. **Implement your tools**

Determine which survey tool to use

There are numerous web survey tools that are available, offering a range of functionality at a variety of cost. Common examples include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Tool</th>
<th>URL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualaroo</td>
<td><a href="https://qualaroo.com/">https://qualaroo.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Engage</td>
<td><a href="http://webengage.com/">http://webengage.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback Daddy</td>
<td><a href="https://www.feedbackdaddy.com/">https://www.feedbackdaddy.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survicate</td>
<td><a href="http://survicate.com/">http://survicate.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop survey</td>
<td><a href="https://www.popsurvey.com/">https://www.popsurvey.com/</a></td>
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In deciding which survey tool to use, you should determine your own specific requirements and evaluate each against these. Requirements to consider include:

- **Cost**

- **Ease of implementation and change**
  - How easy is it to implement and amend the survey?[^1]

- **Quality of design and non invasiveness**
  - Will it fit with your website design?
  - Do you want it to be natively branded with your logo?

- **Flexibility of targeting users**
  - How much flexibility do you need to specify when, how and for whom the survey will appear?
  - Do you want the survey to appear on specific pages, groups of pages or even more than one domain?

- **Mobile compatibility**

[^1]: This is not meant to be an exhaustive list nor do we necessarily advocate one over another.

[^2]: Most tools will require you to arrange to get some code installed on your website to implement the survey but then any changes (including activation and deactivation) can be usually be made directly without any code changes.
Are you interested in capturing user motivations for those browsing your website from their mobile devices? If so will the survey also work on these devices?

- **Web analytics compatibility**
  - Do you want to segment your audiences according to their specified motivation, so you can also view their corresponding web behaviours on analytics tools? (Some tools offer links to web analytics tools such as Google Analytics which allows you to combine web motivations (the “why”) with web behaviours (the “what”) – see section below on “Analyse” for more information)

- **Quality of reporting tools**
  - How much detail do you require with the capturing and reporting of survey data?
  - How well presented and easy to share do you need the data to be?

**Configure and activate the survey**

Once you have determined the correct survey tool to use – the second phase of implementation is to configure and activate the survey. This is the point when you can practically configure your questions and your specific survey requirements (as considered above).

Exactly how you will do this will depend on the survey tool you use. For example in the Qualaroo tool, you run through steps of creating/editing survey questions, specifying targeting options, specifying the survey design and previewing. Example of targeting configuration screens include:
3. **Run your survey and capture data**

You are now ready to post the survey live and let your audiences start giving you data.

During this phase it is important to consider how long you want to run the survey for. Is it based on a particular time period or do you want to stop it when you reach a particular sample size? You should ensure that the sample size is big enough to allow you to make some useful insights.

Also important is to monitor your website (via different browsers and devices if appropriate) to check that the survey is appearing as you wished and keeping an eye on the overall response rate to assess whether you should change the questions or how they appear to improve response. Also monitor any free form comments that you might have enabled to assess if the survey is adversely affecting audience experience of your site in any way.

Direct testing via your website combined with using the reporting functionality of your chosen survey tool should help you manage all this.

4. **Analyse your data**

It is essential to build in enough time to review and analyse your data. There are broadly 2 groups of related data that you may be able to analyse

**Survey specific data**

These are the survey responses. You can access and analyse these via the reporting feature of your chosen survey tool and most tools should also allow you to export the data in csv format for onward analysis.

Depending on the functionality of your survey tool you might consider analysing the survey data by posing the following questions:

- What is the split of motivation types?
- How does this change over time?
- How does this change if using a mobile device?
- Do the results agree with your own expectations?

It is important to recognise that whilst there is inherent bias in that you are only capturing data from respondents who are inclined to complete surveys (and so not necessarily a true representation of your entire audience), ensuring a big enough sample size will help mitigate against this giving you more meaningful data.

**Related web analytics data (e.g. Google Analytics)**

This data relates to the web behaviours of segments of people grouped together according to their particular response to the motivation survey

E.g. what did the people who said they came to the website to purchase something actually do on the website?

This is only possible if your survey tools links up to web analytics tools such as Google Analytics or KISSmetrics. Also you can only create appropriate web analytics segments, if you ask your audiences
to self identify with particular agreed motivational categories, rather than asking for free form response.

If your survey tool does have Google Analytics integration and you use surveys that ask your audience to self identify with agree motivational categories, then you can look to create and apply GA segments based on these per the following steps:

The survey responses will create Events in your Google Analytics. To view these log into your Google Analytics account, and then on the side menu click on Behaviour – then Events – then Overview

Within the Events Overview section, events are listed by Event Category, Event Action and Event Label. The specific response to the survey will be listed in the Event Label section

For example:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Engage in casual browsing without looking for something specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Find specific information for personal reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Find specific information for research or professional reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 Note: Google are actively developing their Analytics product, adding new features and re-organising the Analytics user interface. This resource is based on the look, feel and functionality of Google Analytics as at October 2014.
You can create a segment based on a relevant Event Label. To create a segment you need to go into the Admin section of Google Analytics and then into the Segments section (under Personal Tools & Assets). For more information about applying and viewing segments in Google Analytics, please refer to the Audience Finder Google Analytics Segments resource (which you can find per http://audiencefinder.org/articles/culture24-digital-resources)

When you are in the relevant section in Google Analytics that allows you to create the segment, you can do this for the survey outputs by setting Advanced Conditions. You can then specify the condition in which the segment should be created based on the wording of the Event Label

E.g.:  

![Segment Creation](image)

Once you have created the segments, you can apply these to Google Analytics data to see how the particular motivational categories behaved on the website.

![Audience Overview](image)

For each segment you could look at the following web behaviours:

- What pages did they commonly visit?
- What was their “conversion rate” against any goals you may have specified?
- What was their typical web journey?
- Where did they commonly enter and exit your website?
- How were they commonly referred to your website?
- What were their common engagement metrics? (session duration, average time on site, page depth, frequency and recency)
You will then get a much more rounded insight into your audience based on both motivation and behaviour.

For more information about applying and viewing segments in Google Analytics please refer again to the Audience Finder Google Analytics Segments resource (which you can find per http://audiencefinder.org/articles/culture24-digital-resources

5. **Iterate your research**

It could be that having analysed your data you have a better idea of your audiences needs, but you would still like more information or have a better idea what further question you wish to pose. You may also wish to test out a hunch or idea that was informed by the analysis phase. It is therefore important to always build in an iteration phase into your user research, that allows you to refine or redirect your research based on the learning gathered to date.

Possible ideas for iterations include:

- Running exactly the same survey as before

  But perhaps configured differently e.g. with different targeting settings, on different pages, for longer

- Amending the questions asked

  Perhaps by using pre-existing motivation options informed by previous capture of free form comments. Alternatively asking more specific questions about one broader area of motivation e.g. specific questions about research motivations

- Focusing the survey on a smaller area of your website
E.g. Focusing on user motivations related to web pages that you think are problem areas or focusing say just on the “Visit Us” pages

- Running A/B tests

You may have learnt from your surveys that users with a particular motivations (e.g. those interested in research), are not being adequately served by your website. You may have a hunch how you could amend this on your website (e.g. by making research materials more prominent on your home page). You can test this hunch out by conducting A/B testing with different version of the home pages and also using surveys alongside this. For more information about A/B testing please read the Audience Finder A/B testing resource (which you can find per http://audiencefinder.org/articles/culture24-digital-resources).

6. Act on your findings

The final stage for any research experiment is to act on your findings and make a change.

This could include running more iterations of research to become better informed, making simple changes to your website to meet audience needs (as tested by A/B testing detailed above) or making more significant changes to meet the needs of a priority audience motivation.

For example following similar online motivation research, the V&A identified the “Plan a Visit” motivational category as a key online audience segment. They discovered that 30% of all visits to their website included the visit information pages and a large proportion of which was from mobile phones. Their response to these findings was to overhaul the visitor information pages to make them easier to use on a mobile phone.

For more information please see

http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/digital-media/making-mobile-users-experience-better
Applying this thinking in practice – a case study

As part of Culture24’s “Lets Get Real” Phase 2 Action Research project, we ran an online audience motivation exercise with all 22 project participants, each of whom ran simple online surveys on their websites asking the following question:

The participants were a mix of museums, arts centres, performing arts organisations and cultural publishers. For some organisations the wording was changed slightly to make it more relevant for their organisation. Participants were supported in analysing the results not only of survey data but also of related Google Analytics data and to then explore what this meant for them as organisations. For many organisations this activity and the related results were hugely insightful. For example:

**Shakespeare’s Globe:**

“It is interesting to look at these segments and find detailed results for specific types of audience rather than simply seeing theatre splashed everywhere. It seems to show the lack of visitors coming for professional and research reasons and our resources being very under-seen. Our mission is to be the first point of reference for the study and appreciation of Shakespeare in performance, which could be reasoned to be ‘plan a visit’, but we could also be under-performing online on the professional side, where offline experiences perform very well. Definitely lots of food for thought.”

**Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum of Wales:**

“As the data from this survey shows, most people come to our site in order to plan a visit; therefore we would like to research how to promote exploration of more in depth content for this type of visitor.”
We notice that the key exit pages from those who answered ‘plan a visit’ on the survey are from ‘visit’ pages. We would like to add in links to content pages to get more people to extend their visit and learn more about the Museum and its collections.

**Historic Royal Palaces:**

“The segments that are most important to our venue are the ‘make a booking’ and ‘plan a visit’ segments. However we know from this analysis that the ‘make a booking’ segment appears also to be underperforming as their ticket purchase journey shows a high exit rate at the beginning.

The potential future growth segments are those looking for information for personal reasons and ‘casual browsers’ as they potentially represent people who are interested in our content that we could engage with more. We could explore opportunities to better attract these segments to continue their engagement with us by surfacing ‘call to actions’ such as signup for our newsletter or follow our social channels etc, on pages they visit.

**REcreative:**

(REcreative is an online community and resource built as an educational platform for young people by the South London Gallery in collaboration with Tate, Whitechapel Gallery, Royal Academy of Arts and the Hayward Gallery).

“Casual browsing is the main reason why people come to our website, which is unsurprising as one of the website’s main aims is to become a space to browse for inspiration. However the segment that is most important to our venue is the ‘to create or respond to content’ segment that was specifically created for us, as we believe this reflects REcreative’s main ‘unique selling point’ (USP).

Our analysis showed that this segment is the least engaged with the resources section of the site (specifically the film/curated content). We’d like to see a greater interaction between this segment creating their own work and using the information from the resources section to support individual practise”

For more information about the online user motivation work conducted as part of the Let’s Get Real Phase 2 research project, please download the Project Report and see Chapter 7

http://weareculture24.org.uk/projects/action-research/
Further reading

http://www.mobilized.com/blog/survey-tools-to-improve-your-business

http://www.slideshare.net/rstein/visitor-engagement-online-and-onsite

http://www.museumsandthefweb.com/mw2012/papers/exploring_the_relationship_between_visitor_mot

http://weareculture24.org.uk/projects/action-research/


http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/digital-media/making-mobile-users-experience-better

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