MODEA

How Does Your Website Stack Up?

Decoding four key website metrics for healthcare providers

It's a story about how healthcare consumers are using your website, and it's told in milliseconds, minutes, and percentages. Inside each of these numbers — available for free and to anyone — are the answers to some of the most basic questions marketers have about how visitors behave on a website.

Not only can you uncover how long visitors stay and how often they abandon a page, but also which pages they engage with while there, what their journey through your site looks like, and whether or not they come back. **Put simply, your analytics data is how you can measure whether or not your hospital, health system, or academic medical center is achieving the marketing objectives your team has outlined.**

The problem is, your analytics data often requires you to be a detective to understand what the numbers are telling you. For example, a high bounce rate is bad and a low bounce rate is good—right? Not necessarily. But surely the longer your average session duration is, the better? Wrong again. Or maybe right. It just depends. Everything needs context, and that's what this report is going to provide.

To do that, we're going to share averages for some of the most common metrics—averages pulled from more than a dozen clients we've worked with in the past two years, which include academic medical centers, children's hospitals, and regional healthcare systems.

If you are wondering how your analytics numbers stack up against other healthcare institutions, this report can answer some of those questions.

Your Google Analytics data tells a powerful story

Four metrics that matter to hospitals

01 BOUNCE RATE

02 AVERAGE PAGE LOAD TIME

03 AVERAGE SESSION DURATION

04 NEW VS. RETURNING VISITORS

For this report, we have picked four of the most common Google Analytics metrics — metrics you are already familiar with and most likely already track.

For each metric, we'll provide a range (based on the averages we've gathered from our client data), and explain what's going on at each end of the range. We'll help you decipher what's a potential red flag and what means you can pat yourself on the back. Throughout this report, we've included links to several powerful tools that can help you assess different aspects of your site.

There is a constant expectation for healthcare organizations to be more data-driven. Marketing teams, in particular, are under pressure to mine data, and then to use it to understand their consumers and market to them. The great news is that your web analytics platform gathers gobs of data that you can leverage. Your analytics data both answers questions and points the way forward. That's why every web project that we undertake at Modea involves touching analytics. Data discovery is always the first step, and the analytics we're going to walk you through are some of the very same analytics we investigate.

So let's be investigators together, and see if we can get you some answers about what your web visitors are doing, and how that compares to some of the leaders in the healthcare space.

"Put simply, your analytics data is how you can measure whether or not your hospital, health system, or academic medical center is achieving the marketing objectives your team has outlined."

DID YOU KNOW . . .?

1. A high **bounce rate** doesn't mean something is wrong, but a very low one might mean something is. *Read more on pg. 3*

2. *Slow* **page load times** *often lead to higher bounce rates. Learn more on pg. 6*

3. A long **session duration** could indicate either frustration or engagement on the part of your user. *Read more on pg. 8*

4. **New users** tend to have higher session durations while **returning users** tend to have a higher percentage of calls to action executed. *Continue reading on pg. 10*

DID YOUR USERS GET WHAT THEY NEEDED RIGHT AWAY, OR SIMPLY LEAVE IN FRUSTRATION?

That's really the central question you have to ask when looking at bounce rate. Because, let's face it, bouncing sounds bad. Unstable even. After all, we tend to think negatively about people who bounce from job to job or relationship to relationship. So web users bouncing around the web, unhappy and unfulfilled, is a marketer's worst nightmare. You can hear the pleas: Please stay on our site and look around! Schedule an appointment at least! Do something that creates revenue!

But before you panic, let's consider some things:

- 50 to 75 percent is a rather large range; if you see your number reflected in there somewhere, take a breath and know that you are fairly typical.

- If your bounce rate is significantly lower than 50%, there may be an error with coding or some other problem.

- If your bounce rate is at the high end of the range, there may be a perfectly good explanation for it.

- Bounce rate is almost always higher for mobile.

Bounce Rate

If a user comes to your site, views a single page without taking any action, and leaves, it's a bounce. Your bounce rate is the percentage of times that happens. If a visitor pulls up your site, sees the phone number they need immediately at the top of the page they land on, and closes the browser, it's a bounce.

RANGE
Our data shows the typical bounce rate for healthcare institutions to be between

50%   75%

WHY A HIGH BOUNCE RATE ISN'T ALWAYS BAD

Let's say a parent searches "kids loud cough" in the middle of the night when their 3-year-old wakes them up with a cough that sounds like a barking dog. A page on your site is one of the top hits (good job, marketing team!) and within 30 seconds of glancing at your page, your content helps that bleary-eyed parent confirm what they suspected: it's croup—which sounds far worse than what it is—and their child just needs to sit in some steam for a bit. They exit the browser and go turn on the shower to steam up the bathroom. *Your site has provided them exactly what they need.*

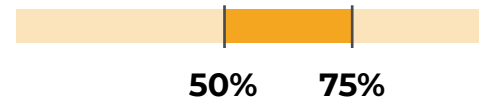And you know what else? *That visit is recorded as a bounce.*

It's a bounce because they didn't click to watch a video, or learn more, or even scroll down very far. *It didn't "convert" in the traditional sense. But in the longer game of brand reputation building, this is still a "successful" visit.* In general, editorial content (such as health library content) tends to have a high bounce rate.

You may also have a higher bounce rate if you are investing heavily in advertising and lead generation campaigns. Someone might click on your ad out of curiosity, but then realize it's not what they wanted. A paid visit to your site is never quite as high intentioned as an organic visitor.

In short, a high bounce rate doesn't mean you are doing something wrong. But it is a chance to think about if what you are doing matches your business objectives.

> A high bounce rate doesn't mean you are doing something wrong. But it is a chance to think about if what you are doing matches your business objectives.

WHY A VERY LOW BOUNCE RATE COULD BE ARTIFICIAL

A low bounce rate could mean your users are engaged, but if it's too-good-to-be-true low, there is probably something else going on. There are three things we've seen create artificially low bounce rates:

1. **Your Google Analytics code is implemented incorrectly.** A duplicated code can drastically throw off your bounce rate. It's easy to fix (but also easy to have incorrect in the first place). If you have Google Analytics implemented through Google Tag Manager, install the Tag Assistant Chrome extension to help identify which pages, if any, have a duplicated analytics code.

2. **Your event-tracking plan is a bit too overeager.** You can use certain tags to track things like when users scroll down the page (a scroll depth tag). If your tag is set to register an "action" when the user has barely scrolled at all, visits that would usually be recorded as bounces wind up looking like visits where the user has engaged within Google Analytics, you can easily look to see what tags are firing on each page of your site. (These kinds of tags aren't very common, but we did discover it with at least one client during a standard analytics audit.)

3. **You haven't filtered out BOTs.** You could have a lot of BOT traffic crawling your site. A BOT can hit one page, or they could hit every page. You want to eliminate BOTs and spiders from your analytics data—but it requires changing the setting in Google Analytics (all traffic is counted otherwise). Be prepared though: plenty of our clients thought their traffic numbers were much higher than they were until we filtered out the BOTs. Here is how to filter bots in Google Analytics.

WHAT ELSE YOUR BOUNCE RATE MIGHT BE TRYING TO TELL YOU

We've given you the good news (you're a lifesaver when it comes to helping a parent through croup!) and the bad news (sorry about those bots—they have shattered many a marketer's dream!). Now, let's talk about the **design-related reasons** that your bounce rate might be at the high end of that range.

Your site has poor navigation and usability. Your visitors may leave quickly because they don't quite know what to do next. One Nielsen report found that the first 10 seconds of a web visit are critical, and many visitors will skedaddle if things aren't immediately clear. Or maybe your site is easy to navigate on their computer, but when they pull it up later on their phone, it isn't as easy to navigate, so they give up. (See sidebar about mobile bounce rates.)

Your site takes too long to load. People simply give up if they see that load status bar moving too slowly. Our research has found a large correlation between bounce rate and page load time. The effect is even stronger on mobile. Check out Google's Page Speed Insights tool to see what might be slowing your site down.

Your site isn't mobile-friendly. If you're not certain if your site is mobile-friendly, use Google's Mobile-Friendly Test to find out.

SO WHAT DO I DO IF MY BOUNCE RATE IS ABOVE 75 PERCENT?

After you rule out technical reasons, ask yourself this: Do our marketing objectives require the majority of users to take an action on the page? If so, have we:

- Prioritized the mobile experience?
- Stated our message clearly from the second the page loads?
- Made our site easy to navigate?

"Our research has found a large correlation between bounce rate and page load time. The effect is even stronger on mobile."

BOUNCE RATES ARE ALWAYS HIGHER FOR MOBILE

Across the board, bounce rates are higher on mobile because pages take longer to load (and as we've said, there is a strong correlation between page load speed and bounce rate). The user experience is also amplified for mobile. Nobody wants to have to pinch and zoom to see content.

However, most large healthcare providers still design for web first, which means they design for a large screen first, and then create a version of that for mobile. This usually means they have large images that aren't optimized for mobile (so it takes the page longer to load). Users either leave in frustration, or once on the site, it's not a streamlined experience, so they quickly cut and run. This is why some healthcare organizations are moving toward a mobile first web strategy.

◿◿ MODEA

HOW MUCH DO THOSE SECONDS REALLY MATTER?

This is an easy question to answer: *A LOT*. When it comes to how long it takes a page to load, today's consumers expect speed. It's a harsh reality for marketers, but every second your page hasn't loaded is one more reason for a visitor to say "never mind" or to succumb to distraction—like the news alert or text message that pops up while they're waiting.

We know there is a correlation between page load speed and bounce rate for healthcare institutions. So if your bounce rate is high and your page load speed is on the bigger end of that range, you might want to bring a diagnostic eye to the issue.

WHY DOES IT TAKE MY SITE SO LONG TO LOAD?

Though it is generally outside of your control, one factor that affects page load time is user connection speed. If someone's Wifi is crawling along, you can't do much about that. Also, page load time is slower across the board on mobile—both because leveraging a cellular network to load data takes longer, and because most websites (even mobile-friendly ones) are still not built with mobile in mind.

But do you know one of the most common reasons that pages load slowly? Something you actually 100 percent control? Images. That's right, **images that aren't optimized for the web (especially for mobile) can slow things down to a crawl.** Optimizing images is one of the most basic steps you can take to improve how your site performs. (This is an excellent and detailed tutorial that takes you through some fundamentals of image optimizing for the web.)

If you work to optimize images and don't see any improvement, you may also want to consider:

- Reviewing your site architecture overall.

- Examining to see if you have a large number of redirects or other coding issues that are slowing your site down.

- Using tutorials, like this one from Chrome DevTools, to learn ways to optimize your site for faster load time

- Running an audit in Lighthouse, an open-source tool that can help you identify areas for improvement.

Average Page Load Time

The average of how long it takes a page to load, from the time a visitor clicks on a link to completion. Page load time is affected by the network and server time, as well as the time it takes the browser to load.

RANGE
Our data shows the typical average page load time for healthcare institutions to be between

3 to
7 seconds
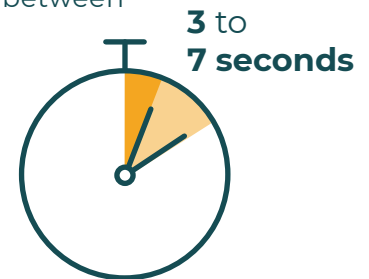
Google also offers a page speed insights tool that breaks down how long it's taking your pages to load, and what the biggest factors are in that time.

WE CAN'T SAY IT ENOUGH: MOBILE MATTERS

As we mentioned, page load times are slower in general on mobile. You don't have control over the speed of the cellular network a user is accessing, but you do have control over the decisions you make about prioritizing mobile, especially if you are redesigning your website.

Google already uses mobile-first indexing, which means it now favors the mobile version—not the desktop version—of the content for indexing and ranking. Considering that 94 percent of people with smart phones now use their phone to search for local information (like the local healthcare system), a good mobile site is essential if you want people to find you, and to not abandon your page because the images aren't loading correctly or the content is too difficult to navigate. (If you're not sure if your site is mobile-friendly, Google will check it for you and tell you.)

If you have both a high bounce rate and slow average page load speed, definitely examine your mobile strategy.

> *"Every second your page hasn't loaded is one more reason for a visitor to say "never mind" or to succumb to distraction—like the news alert or text message that pops up while they're waiting."*

Still confounded by your website data? We're happy to talk through it with you

Email us at info@modea.com and we'll respond within 24 hours

DOES EVERYONE NEED TO SIT DOWN AND STAY A WHILE?

We have this idea that more time on a site is better . . . but is it always?

If a patient who has just been diagnosed with a condition your hospital specializes in comes to your site, you want them to be able to do their research, learn about your treatment, and perhaps read some blog posts featuring patient stories. A longer session duration likely means they are finding what they need and engaging with your content. By contrast, if a patient simply wants to pay their bill, understand where to park, or look up the name of one of your doctors, a longer session duration likely isn't a good thing, because it could indicate that it's taking too long to navigate your site and find what they need. They don't want to hang out, and the more quickly you can send them on their way, the happier they'll be.

You need to dive into what people are doing on your site to know what to make of your session duration numbers. This means looking at the nature of the page, overlaid against your strategy for the page. **Are you aiming for transactions or engagement? One isn't better than the other. But they definitely are not the same.**

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK IF YOUR AVERAGE SESSION DURATION IS SHORT

If your users aren't sticking around very long, and engagement is a high priority for you, we have a few questions for you—the very same questions we ask our clients when we audit their analytics.

- **Is your site mobile-friendly?** Just as bounce rate is higher for mobile, average session duration is typically lower. One explanation is that people are more distracted on their phones and/or looking for quick answers. Another explanation is that your mobile experience is frustrating, so even if they are in research mode, they don't stick around very long.

- **Is your site layered in the right places and simple everywhere else?** We continually work with healthcare institutions to refine this balance, which is especially important for health system websites, which have to serve multiple purposes. You want your web experience on both desktop and mobile to be so streamlined that a user can stealthily get in and out if they want. But if they have marked out 30 minutes on their calendar to research a service or a condition, then

Average Session Duration

How long a visitor tends to stay on your site during one session on average. It's calculated by dividing the total duration of all sessions by the number of sessions.

RANGE
Our data shows the average session duration for healthcare institutions is between

**1 minute** to **2 minute, 30 seconds**
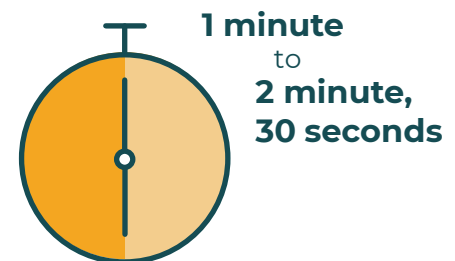
you want all the content there.

- ○ **Are you clearly communicating calls to action on each page?** Does your user know where to go next? Is the path to what they want (an appointment, a hopeful story about a patient with their same condition, an easy-to-understand explanation of a surgical procedure their child will need) obvious?

- ○ **Are you investing heavily in digital advertising?** In the same way that paid visits to your site tend to create a higher bounce rate, they also make for a shorter session duration, and can throw your average off.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR USER'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE SITE?

One way to learn more about your users is to leverage a screen recording tool like Inspectlet, Crazy Egg, or Hot Jar. With these tools, you simply attach some code to your site, and it will record what people are doing on your site. You can go back and watch sessions, and filter what kinds of sessions you want to see, such as mobile sessions under 60 seconds.

It may also be helpful to look at what your users are searching for within your site. What do they need help finding? What clues do their queries provide about the experience of navigating your site?
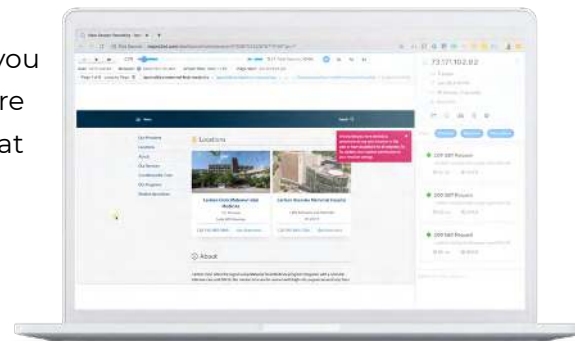
Finally, something we often do when trying to understand a hospital's analytics data is to create personas and study their journey. For example, what is a cancer patient's journey through your site like, versus a parent trying to schedule well visits for their child, versus a potential referring physician?

For each persona, identify the content that is sticky (meaning they dive in and stay a while) versus the content that merely lands them stuck (meaning they sigh and close the browser in frustration).

"You want your web experience on both desktop and mobile to be so streamlined that a user can stealthily get in and out if they want. But if they have marked out 30 minutes on their calendar to research a service or a condition, then you want all the content there."

ARE YOU COURTING NEWCOMERS OR COURTING LOYALTY?

With the new vs. returning metric, there is no clear "better" split. While many hospitals hover around 20 percent returning visitors, it can be closer to 40 percent, and these percentages matter, depending upon your strategic goals as an organization.

The new vs. returning metric can help you better understand who is coming to your site, and if those users are behaving differently. Patients searching for primary care, for example, will engage differently than patients looking for specialty care or specific doctors.

If you are an academic medical center with a strong focus on innovation and specialty care, your website should support returning visitors who have a longer, more nuanced healthcare journey. Because they have a more complex situation, they will likely have more touchpoints with your health system, whether they keep coming back to the site to research their condition and learn about treatments, or to complete transactions like paying a bill. In fact, these returning users tend to have a higher percentage of calls to action executed (such as clicking or calling to request an appointment).

By contrast, for a health system in a highly competitive landscape, it may be all about driving new patient acquisition. While loyalty is still a component, a higher percentage of new visitors means your efforts to reach new customers are working. New users tend to have higher session durations because they're coming for the first time, which means they are getting acquainted with your site and learning about your programs.

New Vs. Returning

This is a breakdown of visitors who are new to your site, versus visitors who have been to your site before. It can be helpful to track, since these two groups tend to behave differently.

RANGE
Our data shows that for health care institutions

New Visitors
60% - 80%

Returning Visitors
20% - 40%

HOW TO USE NEW VS. RETURNING VISITOR DATA

A helpful exercise is to map your new vs. returning analytics against your revenue, to see if your website traffic is aligning with your marketing strategy. For example, if 80 percent of your revenue comes from complex cancer care and chronic condition management, you'd want to see a higher percentage of returning visitors.

Wondering how else you can slice and dice your data? Here are a few more suggestions:

- If your main objective is to increase market share in your area, is your new visitor ratio at the higher end?

- If you've invested in building up editorial content and deep dives into conditions or procedures, are your returning visitors engaging with that content?

- What is the conversion rate (clicking through on calls to action) for new visitors vs. returning visitors?

- Are you investing heavily in paid advertising as part of an acquisition strategy? Has your percentage of new visitors increased?

- What percent of new vs. returning visitors enter on your home page, versus a specific page? For those who enter on the home page, what is the secondary path page for new visitors vs. returning visitors?

The new vs. returning metric can help you better understand who is coming to your site, and if those users are behaving differently.

What now?

WHERE DO YOU GO FROM HERE?

Knowing how your analytics stack up to other healthcare institutions can be a helpful benchmark. There are likely some things your marketing team is doing right, and some places that could use improvement. Wherever you are along this continuum, there have never been more tools available to help you.

This is an exciting time for healthcare, because today's care is helping people live better, longer, and happier lives. Your job as a marketer is to tell those stories. Your website is the perfect vehicle to reach people with those stories, but it can always use fine-tuning. We hope this report has helped you figure out what types of fine-tuning will most benefit your hospital or health system.

We are data and design nerds, and we want to help healthcare institutions thrive. So if you're stuck, reach out at info@modea.com, and we'll dive under the analytics hood with you.

ABOUT MODEA

Healthcare consumers expect seamless digital experiences. They want to tap, swipe, and click, using one hand and in real time—without backtracking. If your healthcare organization doesn't provide that kind of experience, from initial appointment scheduling through the final bill, your patients might go elsewhere, even if the care isn't as good.

At Modea, we solve this problem for healthcare organizations by doing two things:

1. Consulting with them to develop a strategy for providing their customers with this experience

2. Engineering, designing, and integrating the digital tools that make the experience happen.

If your customer experience is outdated, it will cost you business. We can help you stay competitive and relevant in the current age of the mobile consumer, whether your marketing team has a clear picture of what to do, or you need an expert to help you develop a digital transformation roadmap.

We use data about consumer behavior as the basis for any recommendation we make to an organization. We conduct our own research and have a specialized data analytics team that can pinpoint what your customers are doing (and what they are not doing). For organizations that need buy-in from key stakeholders, this kind of data can move and motivate like nothing else.

We do this consulting and development work because we believe that digital tools should help healthcare consumers have more choice, be more in control, and enjoy greater transparency.

Healthcare organizations that integrate these tools and create well-thought-out, empowering customer journeys will thrive.

We want to help you thrive.

MODEA
DIGITAL CONSULTANCY

We help healthcare organizations identify the right digital strategies and create products that infuse control, transparency, and choice into the consumer healthcare experience.

Contact us to learn how our clients are using website data to build better customer relationships.

540.552.3210 | www.modea.com | info@modea.com