RJI Online Final Report

Originally, this project was geared toward improving the tagging system for blog posts at RJI Online and creating a method for categorization that would benefit users. Since the beginning, we’ve made it into so much more, working with the RJI team on crucial steps toward a total website redesign. Rickelle and I listened to what our client needed, analytical help, and set off to establish multiple analytical dashboards and social sharing strategies in an effort to make sure the next incarnation of the site was smarter, more informed and had a leg up on the competition. We turned to Ducksboard, Google Analytics and a strategy of UTM tagging, working with Brian Steffens, Lamar Henderson and Nate Brown every step of the way and making sure we had every RJI need covered. When the new website launches at the end of this year, the new analytical brain behind the scenes will lead the site to success.

Tagging

RJI Online currently has three main tags: Ideas, Experiments, Research. On their face, each one doesn’t mean much besides being a buzzy concept word for a lot of what RJI Online produces. Beyond that are 36 similarly broad categories with article archives of only nine to over 1,000, aided by a peculiar Criteria Selector. The Selector has four different drop down menus where users can choose between the three tags mentioned, Content Type, Author and Date, leaving the tags out entirely. Brian Steffens, communication director at RJI and our boss, expressed his displeasure with
the tagging system in place. And so we began figuring out new categories, sub-tags, and a simpler way to fit every post by RJI into a set number of parameters.

One of the ways we went about this was to hand out surveys to all of RJI’s stakeholders: students, fellows and faculty. We asked ‘What is RJI known for?,’ ‘Why do people come to RJI?,’ and to the fellows and faculty, ‘What do we want to be known for?’ The student’s responses dealt more with the physical being of RJI, praising the facilities, impactful speakers and events, and overall theme of journalistic excellence. Most student respondents were journalism students who worked in RJI often, but did not visit RJI Online. The fellows and faculty were a bit more blunt. We’re keeping the answers in house, but the gist was that while RJI attracts journalistic professionals of all stripes, the foundation doesn’t know what it wants to be known for and often has its fingers in many pies. With this info, we tried to establish a theme of RJI while sticking with broad tags and categories to accommodate RJI’s diverse interests.

Another resource we looked at was a search term report compiled by Chen Liu, a computer science student who briefly worked with us. Using her Drupal API report, we saw that the most common search terms to get to RJI were just that, RJI and Reynolds Journalism Institute. Most people either searched the institute’s name or even attached a fellow’s name to the search. For example, Roger Fidler’s research was the subject of many searches, as was last year’s Safe Trek app, developed at RJI’s Futures Lab. We also saw a disproportionate amount of searches for ‘codes of ethics’ on the site, as international media look to Missouri’s impressive journalism school for
tips journalistic ethics. All of these findings were factored in to the final list of tags and sub-tags/examples, displayed below:

1. Marketing
   a. Advertising
2. Collaborators
   a. American Society of News Editors
   b. Center for the Digital Globe
   c. Committee of Concerned Journalists
   d. Digital Publishing Alliance
   e. Global Journalist
   f. Institute for Advertising Ethics
   g. Journalism Digital News Archive
   h. National Freedom of Information Coalition
   i. Pictures of the Year International
3. Crowdfunding
4. Crowdsourcing
5. Analytics
6. Futures Lab
7. Broadcast
8. Documents
   a. Newsbooks
   b. Tipsheets
   c. White papers
9. Galleries
   a. Audio
   b. Images
   c. Videos
10. Newsletters
    a. Futures Lab update
    b. RJI links
11. Innovation
12. Education
    a. Webinars, Training
13. Entrepreneurship
14. Ethics
15. Events
    a. Speakers
16. Mobile
17. Photojournalism
18. Posts
    a. Blog
    b. News
    c. RJI in the News
19. Presentations
20. Press Freedom
This list is still a work in progress and will likely shift and change as Lamar gets deeper into the new site’s guts and mechanics, but we feel the variety listed here should cover everything RJI posts and reports. Beyond these tags, listings of About, Contact and Legal will all live in the website’s footer. From here, we turned our attention to analytics.

‘Site Overview’ Board

Once we decided to expand our RJI Online work to analytical dashboards, exploring Google’s offering was a no-brainer. Free, comprehensive and mostly visual, we decided to immediately start building multiple dashboards with Google Analytics. Luckily, RJI Online already had an account with Google so all we had to do was position the right funnels beneath the flow of traffic.

To get a feel for Best Analytical Practices for a pair of relative newbies, we went beyond the rudimentary Google searching and talked with Brad Best about his experiences in his analytics class, Interactive Advertising II. Brad actually sent us an in-house review of last semester’s final client work, a very generous move that put us on
the right path and helped shape our RJI boards. Since RJI isn’t in the business of ad revenue or ecommerce, beyond their newsbooks, we focused solely on the tried-and-true goals of bringing in more visitors and augmenting their visit experience and duration.

In reviewing the Interactive Ad report, we learned a few things. One, to successfully use analytics is to diversify your boards, creating multiple looks for multiple sets of information. With our limited timeframe, we decided to create two boards with Google: a ‘Site Overview’ board and a ‘Social’ board that would track social media traffic. Second, a Daily Report is necessary to gauge any one post’s splash with RJI Online’s audience. Unfortunately, Google is a bit limited in this area and lacks the metrics to track and code specific posts but we circumvented this problem by incorporating UTM tagging into our strategy. Third, use your boards to gauge user feedback on site changes before permanently deciding on any one change to your site. This tip will be especially relevant to RJI Online as the site will undergo a major redesign in the next year and these Google boards, along with research by the RJI team, will help inform Lamar and co. of what’s wanted, needed and expected for the new RJI Online.

The first board we made was a basic look at the traffic coming in to RJI Online. Measuring all site traffic, the ‘Site Overview’ board is filled with the essential analytical metrics, a few of which I’ll explain here. Obviously, there’s Total Visits, coded by specific date and amount. But beyond that, we have visits put into the context of time: Day of the Week and Week of the Year.
These reportlets provide vital and actionable data even if they’re formatted in about the least user-friendly way possible. For Day of the Week, the days are coded into numbers, with 0 representing Sunday, 1 representing Monday, and so on. The percentage on each pie slice represents how much of the week’s traffic came on that specific day, giving board users a look at how much impact a certain post had or how many users were turned away after unexpected downtime, for example. Just as important, we can take the traffic window and increase to the point where we can make sensible assumptions about which days see the most traffic. In the last three months, RJI Online saw the most traffic on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, in that order, a result that would definitely impact the editorial process for any post.
Visits by Week of the Year is also coded funny, for reasons that only make sense at Google Headquarters. Each number refers to that week’s order in the 52 weeks of the year, with ‘Other,’ of course, standing in for the present week. This metric is more for an overall look at weekly traffic numbers, and each week’s share of the current time period, which should aim to be consistent if not growing. For RJI Online, each week fluctuates between 2,500 and 3,000 sessions, which is a pretty huge disparity for a site producing daily content like ours. However, if you throw in events on the calendar and periodic research releases by fellows, the fluctuations start to make a bit more sense.
Finally, one other metric I’d like to go over is Bounce Rate. A staple of any website analytics board worth its salt, bounce rate shows which percentage of users open an RJI Online webpage and close it before interacting with the page. Obviously, this action is detrimental to the site as users come and go without exploring the site, robbing content of views, and more importantly, ads of clicks. Without ads to support, bounce rate loses a bit of its all-important luster on RJI Online, but the metric is still worth measuring and improving. As of now, RJI’s bounce rate hovers around 70 percent, meaning 70 percent of visits are one-click-stands. You might think that’s far too much – and it is – but that figure is about normal blog-type sites like ours. The goal would be to lower it to around 50 percent, a massive improvement, but for now, with few content changes coming to the new website, a sustained bounce rate is likely for the future.

We also created a Social board for RJI Online, as the team often shares Link compilations, fellow research, and other content on its various social media platforms. Many of the metrics on this board are the same as on the Site Overview board, but
their implications are obviously different since they will be measuring traffic from Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

![Bounce Rate and Pages per Visit](image)

For example, here we have the Bounce Rate and Pages per Visit metrics, specifically looking at All Visits vs. visits from the three major social networks. Compared to the average bounce rate of 66 percent, both Twitter and Facebook land far past the figure with rates above 70 percent. So why the lower attention spans? Part of this could be explained by the frenetic and multi-sourced nature of social networks, e.g. you’re surfing your Twitter feed and an RJI Online tweet catches your eye so you click on it, read it quickly, and then close it without going past the article, eager to recheck your timeline. It’s the same with pages per visit with session time at RJI Online suffering due to the increasingly ubiquitous places for our attention online. That elusive social media reader can often be the bellwether for how engaging one’s content is, and any time that bounce rate goes down means we’ve managed to hold the lower attention span for at least a few more seconds or pages.

Now, a significant portion of this board’s statistics will work in tandem with the UTM Campaigns board and RJI’s Ducksboard to confirm or refute any trends we see.
emerging from these widgets. With Ducksboard mastering the more top level social statistics, Likes, Retweets, Mentions, Video Views, this board has a decidedly more analytical bent and will act as an essential board of the basics. The Social board is also more of a scattershot of readings, with the UTM tags providing us a more granular look at where our social users are coming from, how many pages they can stand to click through and any other minutiae for RJI’s crucial social demographic.

**UTM Tagging**

During the process of dashboard construction, our team decided to look into the use of UTM tagging. UTM stands for “Urchin Tracking Monitor” and basically transforms website URLs into trackable and vitally important assets. With UTM, users can add categories at the end of URL lines that specify the URL’s specific delivery method, general sharing purpose and campaign identity. All of these variables will then be catalogued and categorized with Google Analytics. For example, here’s a URL with UTM trackers:


The URL, regardless of the trackers, will direct the user to RJI’s recent release of former fellow Roger Fidler’s mobile research report. However, with these additions, like tags in a wild animal’s ear, we can get a very specific picture of who is visiting, how they’re visiting, how long they’re visiting, etc. We’ll start with the ‘utm_source.’ The Source is the precise network or medium the link was shared on; in this case, it was
Twitter. Other values could obviously be Facebook or LinkedIn but non-social network methods work too. For example, the May 2014 Newsletter or even an RJI Links round-up blog post could be the ‘source.’ It will always be the actual platform where the link is shared, whereas the next category, ‘medium,’ is a bit more broad. For this URL, we’ve chosen ‘socialmedia’ as the main ‘source’ is Twitter, but ‘email’ and ‘website,’ for your external link posts, are other choices. Finally, ‘campaign’ would refer to the content or over-arching theme of the URL. Here we have ‘2014fidlerreport’ designating the URL as a Fidler work and more importantly, giving a specific name for individual stats on the Google dashboard. This category should be a major asset for RJI’s many events, speakers, conventions and affiliates as the analysis by Google brings granular details of each event’s engagement with RJI’s audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Acquisition</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sessions</td>
<td>% New Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>twitter.com</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total: 0.22% (11,860)</td>
<td>Site Avg: 68.76% (-10.49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>news-wsu-edu</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15.38%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facebook</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.69%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris Digital Works</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.69%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>islamiccommentary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.85%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linkedin.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.85%)</td>
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</tbody>
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The metrics Google measures with these souped-up URLs are almost identical to the board we’ve constructed. Part of this is to ensure consistency across
dashboards, but another part is the general layout of the ‘Campaigns’ board by Google. This board lies under the ‘Acquisitions’ tab and quietly tracks all UTM tags with metrics like Visits, Bounce Rate, Pages per Session and more. With all of these metrics aimed squarely at specific sources like Twitter links or Hackathon teasers, there’s almost no limit to what we can study and quantify with UTM tagging. The results will be instantaneous, actionable and valuable to a website looking for a new design and a new analytical tilt.

To better understand our goals, we went through various dashboards to decided which one could provide us the best information, both in quantity and quality. After going through these various sites such as Sprout Social and hootsuite, we decided on a dashboard site called Ducksboard. We chose this particular dashboard because of the vast amount of social media connection possibilities as well as the easy-on-the-eyes benefit when trying to sort information. Our main objective with Ducksboard is to take advantage of the ease of use and further share the data that matters most to the RJI team.
Above is how the current RJI Ducksboard dashboard is organized. This is a product of a lot of research into what information was available and more specifically, what information is most useful in this data snapshot format. We found best practices in creating a dashboard, which included first identifying the information consumers and finding out what they are really wanting to know. From there it is a matter of deciding what information/data is needed at an at-a-glance format, making the focus being “actionable information” and “lessons learned,” and finally using the information to change for the better. Using the knowledge we had we decided important basic information to have is; which pages they are visiting, what terms they are searching, how they are getting to our site, and bounce rate.

During the process of creating a Ducksboard dashboard for RJI, the team realized there were other multiple accounts they would like to track. However, only one
account per social media (ex: twitter, facebook) is allowed to link at a time. The solution to this is through the creation of multiple dashboards. With just the click of the mouse, you are able to switch from viewing the RJI dashboard to viewing a dashboard specific to the Futures Lab. There is not a limit to how many dashboards you create, allowing more opportunities for acquiring valuable analytics. Below is the alternate dashboard for the Futures Lab (information currently limited, pending credentials):

In the end, we took a project with the intentions to improve the tagging system for blog posts at RJI Online in order to create a more organized set up for users and found ourselves building a much more comprehensive skeleton for bettering RJI’s website. Through our work with Ducksboard, Google Analytics and a strategy of UTM tagging, we have developed tools that will both inform our team now and continue to inform future generations with important analytics. We hope to have planted a
sustainable platform that will change and influence choices made for RJI Online in years to come.