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OVERVIEW

The client has stated that they are receiving drastically different results from Google Analytics and an internal content management system analytics report detailing outbound traffic from sponsored links. Additionally, traffic is being reported in Google Analytics as "clientsdomainname.com/referral". This traffic is down -97.02% year over year and is cause for concern to the client.

Improvise is being retained to locate the cause of the difference between GA reporting and the client's CMS reporting, review historical data and determine if there are any correlations between the reporting of "clientsdomainname.com/referral" and the sharp decline in reported traffic from these sources. Finally, Improvise should provide recommendations for improvements to GA's setup and the site's architecture and design.

GENERAL FINDINGS

4 variations of hostname are being referenced in hostname report:
- www.clientsdomainname.com
- main.clientsdomainname.com
- clientsdomainname.com
- www.ClientsDomainName.com

In Google Analytics **(GA)** this can lead to improper counting of visits with visits being attributed to each separate domain a visitor enters. This method occurs as opposed to a single attribution of visits to a single domain reference. One of the leading causes of this issue is not declaring a 'multiple domains' and then setting an explicit domain name shown as **'[setDomainName, ".clientsdomainname.com"]'** in the 'Tracking Code' advanced settings (see Exhibit 1 below).
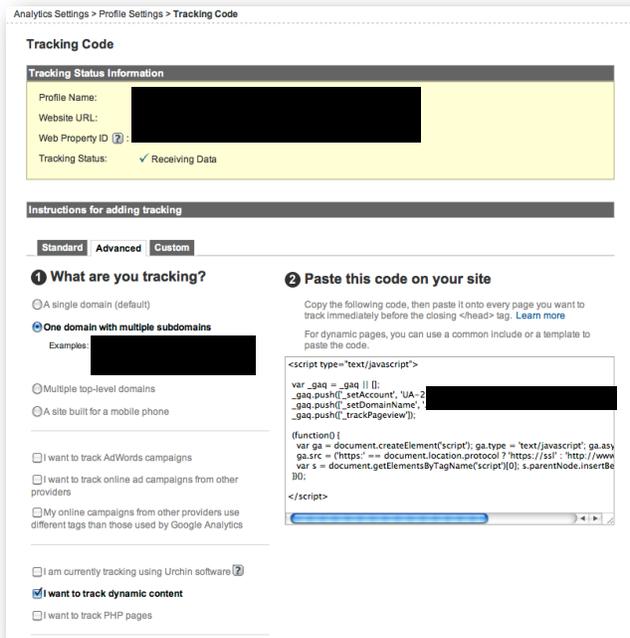

Exhibit 1.

This report is provided on improviseagency.com as an example of our work. It is only an excerpt and not a comprehensive report.

The second issue with Google Analytics and domain references occurs in your Analytics settings, where no 'Default page' was specified (as shown from Test Profile in Exhibit 2). Declaring a 'Default page' eliminates potential cookie resets as visitors move from one domain to a sub-domain and vice versa.

Analytics Settings > **Profile Settings**

Profile Settings: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Profile ID: ▮▮▮▮▮▮

✓ Receiving Data (Check Status ?)

Main Website Profile Information	Edit
Website URL:	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Default page ? :	
Time zone ? :	(GMT-04:00) Eastern Time
Exclude URL Query Parameters:	
E-Commerce Website:	No
Site Search ? :	Don't Track Site Search
AdSense Data:	Receiving AdSense data
Currency displayed as:	US Dollar (USD $)

Google defines a 'referral' as;

> ***A referral occurs when any hyperlink is clicked that takes a user to a new page of file in any website - the originating site is the referrer.***

Self-referrals which can show as 'clientdomainname.com / referral' in GA reports can result from several issues. Those potential pitfalls relevant to clientdomainname.com are as follows:

• tracking code not appearing consistently on every page
• using a search engine that appears on a different sub-domain
• not setting an explicit domain name in the tracking code

We setup a test profile to implement the prescribed fixes in the analytics settings for each of the issues listed. In our test profile, which only contains data from the day and time in which it was setup is not showing any 'internal referrals'. It should be noted that we have not and could not implement the new tracking code with 'setDomainName' explicitly defined.

The following has been implemented in our test profile analytics settings:
1. Added index.html as default page
2. Enabled site search and added keyword include and category ignore parameters (more on this in the next section)
3. Added a hostname filter designed to differentiate pages that appear on multiple sub-domains. This will allows pages to be clearly identified by the sub-domain on which they appear instead of '.../referral' .

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TRAFFIC FINDINGS

Upon inspecting your year over year Referring Sites report, with greater attention paid to August and September, it is clear that a great deal of your traffic is created by internal searches (i.e. search engine). The 2010 reports clearly indicate that your internal search engine usage is down significantly.

As you have noted your largest traffic drop off has occurred from referring site; clientdomainname.com (-97.02%). This designation includes all of the general 'referral' pages. Many of these 'referral' pages include URI's beginning with /search/ or /cgi-bin/search/ .

To gain insight into the potential cause let's take a look at a year over year comparison of August 12, 2009 - September 11, 2009 against August 12, 2010 - September 11, 2010 'Referring Sites' report. Paying attention to the report's 'Visits' category we can see that 'Search' visits are overwhelmingly down with the worst disparity showing '1' visit in 2010 from '2,275' visits in 2009 (line 51).

51.	/search/ ███████					
	August 12, 2010 - September 11, 2010	**1**	2.00	00:00:11	100.00%	0.00%
	August 12, 2009 - September 11, 2009	**2,275**	5.82	00:05:38	84.84%	30.11%
	% Change	**-99.96%**	-65.64%	-96.75%	17.88%	-100.00%

Referring Sites >>> clientdomainname.com >>>

One key piece of information is that the the first referral path '/ ' (which refers to the index page) is showing a variance of -13.97% not as startling as the overall -97.02%. It is also important to note that in this same referral path '**Pages per Visit**' is down -26.72% and '**Average time**' -61.81% while '**New Visits**' are up 9.06% and the '**Bounce Rate**' is up 16.71%.

It's important to understand that the bounce rate is defined as "**single page view visits divided by entry pages**". So if a user only visits one page and then travels to another domain they have 'bounced' from your site. This generally indicates a low level of interest or they were transferred to an undeclared sub-domain where their cookie was reset (this causes them to be treated as a new visitor).

Plain Language:
The majority of your traffic loss is occurring with your search engine. Loss could be occurring because of
A) a change in search functionality
B) a change in placement of the search engine field
C) a change in search engine performance

Additional investigation needs to be placed into what changes occurred to the search engine that could be impacting usage and therefore visits.

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