

# Understanding and Improving Website Bounce Rates

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## Definition

This metric measures the percentage of site visitors who land on a particular page of your web site and then leave your site without engaging in any way (visiting other pages, clicking hyperlinks or calls to action, filling out forms, etc.).

Applications such as Google Analytics determine the overall site bounce rate by averaging the individual page bounce rates.



## But Wait

While often referred to as single-page sessions (mostly true), the Bounce Rate more accurately refers to single engagement hits.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, because they are related to your site, online paid searches, can be calculated into your site analytics. This is true even if only a few people actually click-through to your site. So these could be reflected as valid engagements with an average page per visit count of less than one!

Needless to say, this could adversely influence the site bounce rate.

## What Should My Bounce Rate Be?

Short answer: it depends. Generally you want it to be as low as you can get it. However, your site's design, content, and, importantly, its purpose have a direct bearing on bounce rate.

Imagine, for example, a site that is set up for highly educational purposes with lots of great content in the form of articles. Assuming the site is reasonably optimized for search, visitors are likely to find the site as they research a particular topic. They conduct their search, see what appears to be a great article on the subject, go to this site, read the article, and leave. The site has probably accomplished its purpose by providing educational content. Also, the site probably reflects a very good rate of average time per page. But the bounce rate is high.

Most companies and institutions, however, want to improve their average time on site (increase) as well as their bounce rate (decrease).

For most businesses, a great overall bounce rate is less than 40%.<sup>2</sup> *What is more important is the bounce rate for individual pages.* Landing pages for a particular email marketing campaign, for example, should exhibit low bounce rate percentages because you likely have calls to action on such pages.

## Analyzing Bounce Rates

Google Analytics and other statistical packages will provide an overall site bounce rate. This is meaningful as a top-level metric and your improvement efforts should have a direct bearing on this rate.

However, you would do well to examine the bounce rate of individual pages. This may be challenging for some sites with extremely high page counts. Start with significant pages, such as your menu landing pages. Also include other landing pages tied to your promotional efforts.

You may want to focus your initial efforts on the low-hanging fruit—pages exhibiting high bounce rates (let's say 70-100%).

You may also want to consider two other statistics in evaluating individual page bounce rates:

- Page Ranking
- Average Time on Page

The Page Ranking is simply a reflection of popularity as compared to other pages on the site. Therefore, the more a page is visited, the higher its page ranking becomes.

The Average Time on Page is also significant. For instance, a page that demonstrates a low average session time AND high bounce rate is likely turning visitors off in some way. Something is not working. Or, the wrong people have been drawn to the page.

Also, a high average time on page AND high bounce rate means that you have done a good job in initial engagement but not given them a reason to explore more.

So, target pages to work on using the above criteria.

To get to this data in Google Analytics:

- At the top of the page, set the Date Range as you like. (The default selection is the last 30 days; you may want to look at a longer term.)
- Click on Behavior.
- Click on Site Content.
- Click on All Pages or Landing Pages.

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics Reporting interface. The top navigation bar includes HOME, REPORTING (highlighted), CUSTOMIZATION, and ADMIN. A search bar is present. The left sidebar shows a navigation menu with categories like Custom, Benchmarking, Users Flow, Acquisition, Behavior (selected), Overview, Behavior Flow, Site Content, All Pages, Content Drilldown, Landing Pages, Exit Pages, and Site Speed. The main content area displays a table with the following columns: Page, Pageviews, Unique Pageviews, Avg. Time on Page, Entrances, Bounce Rate, and % Exit. The table lists 10 pages with their respective metrics.

Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit
	26,201 (34.45%) % of Total: 100.00% (26,201)	21,181 (38.18%) % of Total: 100.00% (21,181)	00:01:11 Avg for View: 00:01:11 (0.00%)	13,899 (57.33%) % of Total: 100.00% (13,899)	69.24% Avg for View: 69.24% (0.00%)	53.05% Avg for View: 53.05% (0.00%)
1. [Page]	9,025 (34.45%)	8,086 (38.18%)	00:01:36	7,968 (57.33%)	78.92%	77.99%
2. [Page]	2,893 (11.04%)	2,210 (10.43%)	00:01:38	1,523 (10.96%)	68.02%	57.79%
3. /	1,838 (7.01%)	1,525 (7.20%)	00:01:11	1,311 (9.43%)	46.15%	44.61%
4. [Page]	1,819 (6.94%)	1,341 (6.33%)	00:00:44	56 (0.40%)	66.07%	28.70%
5. [Page]	1,243 (4.74%)	925 (4.37%)	00:01:31	540 (3.89%)	61.48%	49.72%
6. [Page]	1,144 (4.37%)	719 (3.39%)	00:00:40	465 (3.35%)	24.30%	25.79%
7. [Page]	935 (3.57%)	714 (3.37%)	00:01:17	374 (2.69%)	62.57%	47.06%
8. [Page]	916 (3.50%)	709 (3.35%)	00:00:30	48 (0.35%)	79.17%	22.71%
9. [Page]	801 (3.06%)	542 (2.56%)	00:00:37	33 (0.24%)	66.67%	22.72%
10. [Page]	643 (2.45%)	472 (2.23%)	00:01:37	86 (0.62%)	72.09%	33.28%

The list populates according to Page Ranking which is determined by the number of Page Views (1st column).

The list defaults to the top 10. Use the “Show Rows” drop down menu on the bottom right of the screen to select more if desired.

Once the list is populated, keep in mind that you can organize it according to the columns at the top including Avg. Time on Page and Bounce Rate.

## Improving Site and Page Bounce Rates

Where appropriate, you can do a great deal on reducing site bounce rate by eliminating pages with 100% bounce rate. For example, you may have many former landing pages tied to outdated Google ADWords campaigns. Or you may have old pages that you no longer need. Web bots still see these pages and crawl them creating page views with zero time on page and 100% bounce rate. Some of these are legitimate search bots while others are nefarious or have malicious purposes.



## Other Improvement Strategies

- **Know the sources of your site traffic.** If your site experiences high traffic from social media, you can expect higher bounce rates.<sup>3</sup> This is simply a reflection of the nature of this traffic and the disposition of people engaging in your site through this medium.

Take the time to examine the bounce rates on your site in light of the various traffic sources. This analysis can help you determine if you are attracting the *right* audience. The wrong audience inevitably leads to higher bounce rates and shorter time-on-site visits.

A well-done keyword strategy will pay high dividends here. It will help ensure that the right traffic is finding the right content on your site.

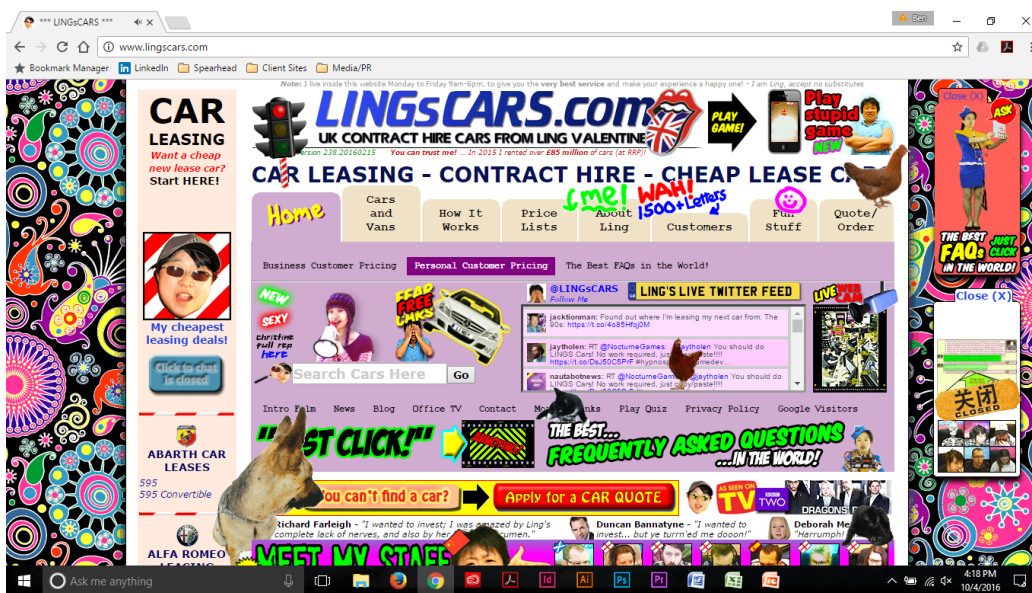
- **Examine your page loading times, particularly for landing pages.** Pages that load slowly increase bounce rates. Visitors start to abandon the page in as little as 2 seconds and none wait any longer than 10 seconds.<sup>4</sup> Slow page loads can also have an impact on your search engine rankings.
- **Check the pathway to page alignment.** Make sure that the keywords, advertisements, and links leading visitors to a particular page properly reflect the content of that page. Misalignment between what pulls them in and what they see when they get there makes people feel they have been duped resulting in high bounce rates.
- **Provide clear calls to action.** Clarity here is key. If users are confused by what you are inviting them to do next, they bounce. Calls to action can include invitations to contact you, filling our forms, and hitting the “more” link for the rest of the story. Generally speaking, most site pages should include some form of a call to action.

○ **Consider a site redesign.** A few factors may drive this decision:

(a) **User friendliness.** A user-friendly design may sound like a very subjective determination. Despite that, it has a great deal of influence over site visitor engagement. As objectively as possible, rate your site in terms of friendliness to humans. Of key importance is the ease of finding what they want. Page layout matters. Fonts matter. Size and quality of images matter.

(b) **Navigation.** From the main menu to on-page hyperlinks, aim for simplicity. While keyword strategies may help in other ways, make these items easy to understand from a human perspective.

(c) **Colors.** Colors convey emotion and can have an influence on the visitor's time on page and willingness to stay on the site. Your overall branding, of course, has some influence here as well. Examine sites that you like and try to determine how the colors used are affecting your perception. Pleasing and attractive color usage is the goal of professional designers.



Don't do this!

This winner of an ugly site contest illustrates what happens when design goes wrong. Color? Yes, it has plenty of that! Navigation? It's there . . . somewhere. And user friendly? Maybe drug user friendly!

Check out the live site for animation overload, if you dare.

- **Use internal links.** When overt calls to action may not be appropriate, provide subtle ones in the form of internal links. When smartly done, internal links can greatly improve page bounce rates.
- **Suggest additional content.** As it relates to current content, recommend additional content such as other pages, other articles, or specific products. You can do so for content found on your site as well as external sites. While external links may seem counter-intuitive to improving bounce rate, remember that visitors stay, or come back to, where they find good content. Mix such external links with internal ones for best results. And always have external links open in a new browser tab or window.
- **Content. Content. Content.** First, content should reflect what is appropriate for your target audience. It should be engaging. It should be well written and well formatted. The words used, the typeset used, and the page layout, including supporting images, should be easily understandable by your audience. Comprehension is enhanced with clear and appropriate headings and logical paragraph breaks.
- **Insist on responsive design.** Responsive design is the minimal expectations for today's site, making them friendly for an ever-increasing mobile audience.



- **Avoid ads & pop-ups.** Anything that annoys a site visitor will increase bounce rates. Avoid advertisements and pop-ups, especially if they are large and distracting.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Use your historical data as well as your goals to set appropriate benchmarks. Bounce rates vary by the type of site as well as site execution and attraction methods.
- **Give it time.** Changes that you make to improve bounce rate may not show an immediate effect. Give it enough time for good data to be collected before passing judgment on your improvement methods.

## Bounce Rate Checklist

Sites that exhibit the best (lowest) bounce rates do many things well. Check your site against this list:



<b>My site ...</b>	
keeps content fresh and and removes outdated pages.	
is getting the right (targeted) traffic.	
has an intelligent keyword strategy.	
has fast loading pages.	
demonstrates alignment between (a) keywords, ads, and links and (b) content.	
provides clear calls to action.	
is visually appealing.	
has clear and simple navigation.	
uses color well.	
offers engaging, well written, and well-formatted content.	
has internal links and suggestions for additional content.	
is responsively designed.	
avoids annoying pop-ups.	

- 1 [Analytics Ninja \(analytics-ninja.com\)](http://analytics-ninja.com), blog 2012 06, "Google Analytics Bounce Rate (actually) Demystified"
- 2 [Rocket Fuel \(rocketfuel.com\)](http://rocketfuel.com), The Rocket Blog, "Good, Bad, Ugly, and Average Bounce Rates"
- 3 [Maximize Social Business \(maximizesocialbusiness.com\)](http://maximizesocialbusiness.com), August 23, 2015 post by Debbie Miller, "Social Media Bounce Rate – Why So High?"
- 4 [KickoffLabs \(kickofflabs.com\)](http://kickofflabs.com), blog entry by Josh Ledgard, "Bounce Rate: 14 ways you are driving people away from your landing pages"



### **About Spearhead Sales & Marketing**

Spearhead is a marketing consultancy firm with an integrated system which relates marketing activities to sales outcomes.

Our system is designed to help you develop key relationships, increase revenue, and build your brand reputation.

From sales training to marketing automation, we have the tools and the team to help you succeed.

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