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CASE STUDY

Are More Pageviews Per Session Good or Bad for SEO & Revenue?

A User Experience Case Study



The Value of User Experience

In the world of digital publishing, user experience is a key cog in everything from digital revenue to website traffic. The measurement and metrics associated with user experience have a proven and recognized correlation with everything from session value to search engine ranking position. In this case study, we took a deep look at one of the mainstay metrics publishers use to measure user experience, pageviews per visit (session).

The goal of the study is to determine what methodologies may prove most effective in increasing the value per visitor from efforts to increase visitor pageviews per session; and what negative affects may lie in artificially inflating these metrics on a digital property.



The Publisher

The digital publisher in this study is a branded niche news website for a broad subculture. They receive approximately 4 million visitors per month, with the majority of those visitors coming from organic search.

Effective Methodologies With Positive Outcomes:

Approximately 1 year ago, this publisher began a concerted effort to extend user sessions on their website to enhance both user experience and long term revenue (as these things had been scientifically correlated by recent research). This publisher began working with technology partner, Ezoic, in an attempt to speed up their site and personalize every visitor's experience; based on multivariate website test results.



Improvements in UX & Revenue

Over the course of one year, the multivariate testing and visitor personalization resulted in...

- A 10% increase in pageviews per session
- A 186% increase in earnings per 1,000 visitors
- 28% lift in total ad revenue



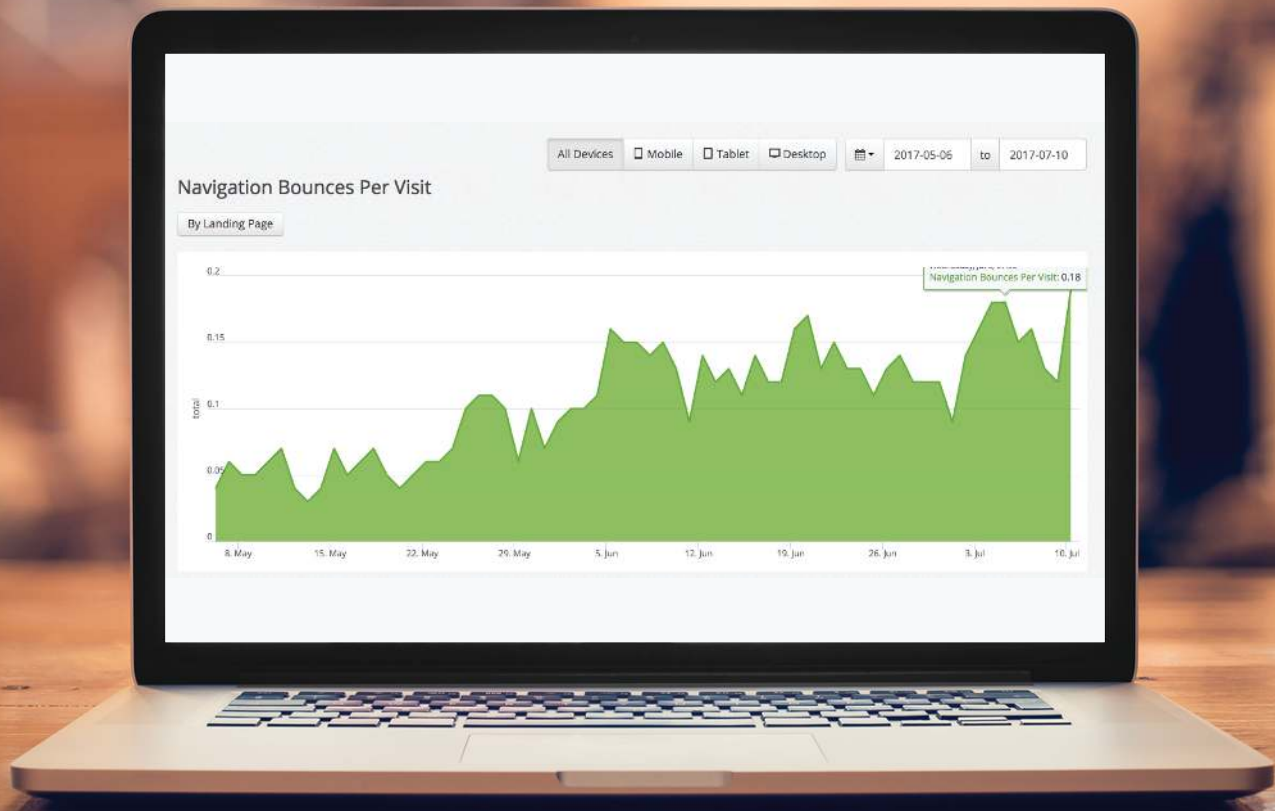
The publisher also saw dramatic improvements in SEO and search engine ranking position during this time period as well. The increase in pageviews per visit were also accompanied — in this case — by equal improvements in time on site and a reduction in bounce rate.



Enhanced user experiences are universally recognized as factors for many search algorithms — and the results in this case seem to reinforce the benefits of these personalization efforts as it relates to organic search positioning.

Ineffective Methodologies With Negative Outcomes:

After their success with improving UX and revenue, this publisher was interested in testing a new mobile technology provider which offered a well-designed looking mobile layout, customized for their website. Included in these layouts are functionalities that were touted as means of assisting users in transitioning to additional articles, for instance swiping right to left or loading a different page once the user reached the bottom of the article. There are a number of these technologies on the market, and the publisher opted to experiment with this technology to see how it could potentially affect their site.



Fake UX & Decreased Revenue

In some ways, the results from leveraging these kinds of technologies on the site appeared promising, as pageviews per visit using this technology increased by about 25%. Unfortunately, when the publisher used advanced analytics to dig deeper, they discovered that navigation bounces nearly tripled during this timeframe.



A navigation bounce is when a user clicks to visit a new page but immediately presses back or bounces from that page; showing that not all pageviews are always created equal. In this case, the publisher saw up to 74% of visitors experiencing navigation bounces on some of their pages after the implementation of this technology. This saw average time on site decrease by about 50% as well.



Negative Impact of Artificial UX Inflation

For this publisher, the steep rise in navigation bounces directly correlated to

- A 14% drop in earnings per 1,000 visitors
- A 23% drop in organic traffic
- A loss of 33% in keywords ranked in the top 20

The publisher directly attributed these negative impacts to the artificial generation of additional pageviews due to the implementation of this new technology; as these pageviews with navigation bounces dilute the value of ad impressions over time and can also be a signal for search engines like Google that a potential searcher is unhappy with part of their experience on a website.



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Study Summary

Authentic UX vs. Fake UX

Authentic user experience metrics reflect the actual experience visitors have throughout the site journey. While metrics such as time on site and page views per visit are universally agreed upon and widely used, they often fail to reflect true user engagement.

The successful methodologies used by the publisher in this study leveraged testing and personalization to deliver preferred experiences to every user in an attempt to extend user sessions and increase pageviews. The unsuccessful methodology leveraged technology to automatically extend user sessions and artificially generate additional pageviews; outside of the user's intent.

Ultimately, the study revealed the importance of authentic user engagement as a mechanism for enhancing organic search traffic and increasing session revenue. Authentic user experiences showed a correlation to increased organic traffic and higher revenue; while pageviews that were generated through technology and misleading layouts resulted in lost keywords and lower ad earnings.

Digital publishers considering these types of initiatives for their websites, should be monitoring intent metrics like navigation bounces to ensure the user experiences they create for visitors are authentic and engaging. This will help them to ensure longevity and sustainability in both organic traffic and digital revenue