

THE AUTHORITY REPORT

Redefining Bounce Rate with Engaged Time

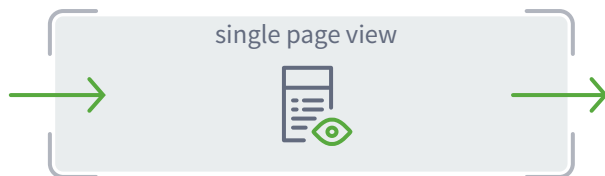
TRADITIONAL METRICS FROM TOOLS LIKE GOOGLE ANALYTICS


Site Visit



 **Visit time** is the difference between time of first page view & time of last page view in seconds

Bounce



 **Visit time** is always zero seconds

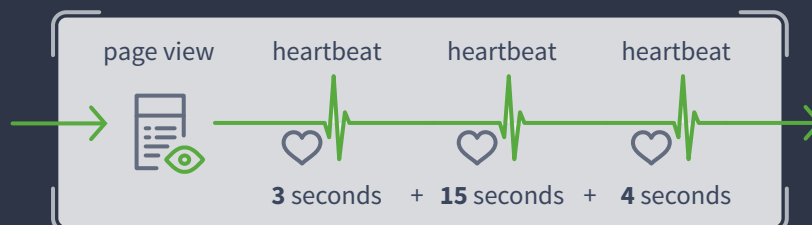
Traditional web analytics platforms have struggled for years with quantifying user engagement on sites and apps. In the most basic form of web tracking, there are only three primary event types tracked per visit: **site entrance**, **site page views**, and **site exit**. The time between site entrance and site exit is known as a visit time, and for many site operators, a large percentage of their visits are very short.


Measuring bounce rate seems sensible in the case of business-to-business or e-commerce websites. As Avinash Kaushik writes in his book *Analytics 2.0*, “Think about it. Not even one tiny click! It is the lowest bar of success: all you want from the visitor in terms of engagement is one click, and you failed.” He goes on further to say, “Bounce Rate equates to people taking absolutely no action on your site.”

But, is this really true in the world of modern news media? Is it true that “not even a single click” is a sign of content failure? Is it true that a single page view means “absolutely no action”?

After completing a recent study of nearly **1.6 billion** news media reader sessions over six months, we don’t think so. We think that traditional ways of measuring bounce rate are just plain wrong. Based on the data, we think we can redefine bounce rate by using a new metric we co-developed with our customers, which is called engaged time.

ENGAGED TIME MEASURED BY PARSE.LY



 **Visit time** is 22 seconds

A typical visit might look like this under the hood: Parse.ly collected four events from the visitor: the initial page view, and three heartbeat events. The heartbeats had engagement numbers of three seconds, 15 seconds, and four seconds, respectively. As a result, there was a total of 22 seconds of engaged time.

Understanding Site Visits Using Engaged Time

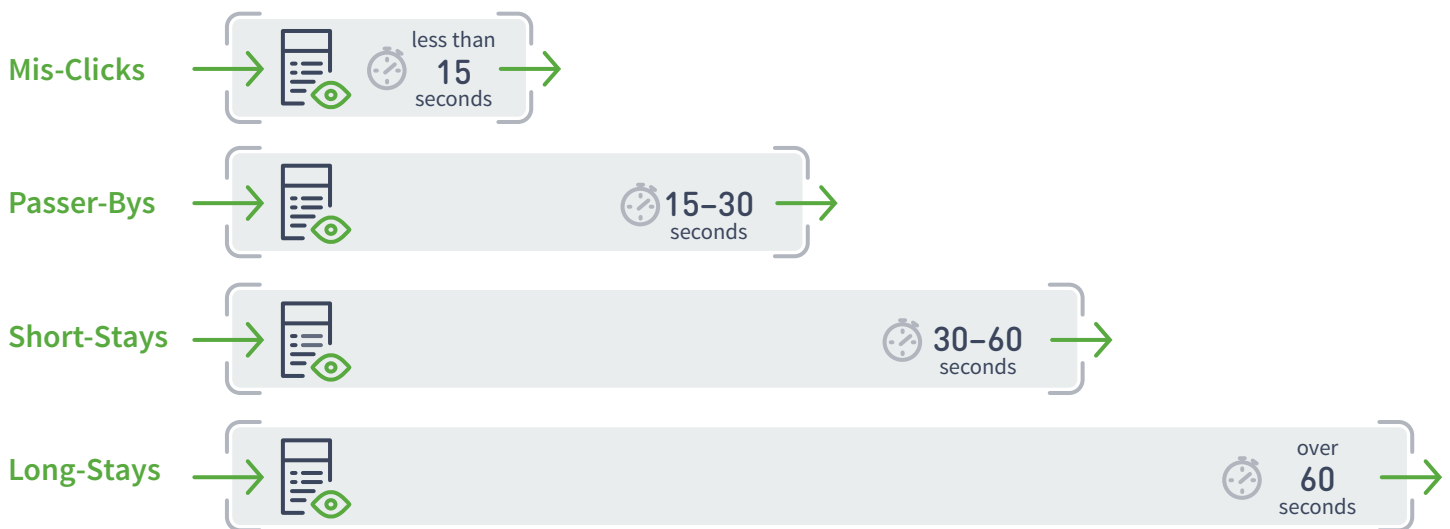
By introducing a new metric, engaged time, Parse.ly can measure—with much more accuracy—how long a visitor stays engaged on a site, regardless of whether there is one or several page views in the visitor session.

The mechanism for measuring engaged time is known as heartbeating. When a visitor comes to a Parse.ly-enabled site, we set a timer, and every 15 seconds, we determine if the visitor was active in the last 15 seconds. If the visitor was, an event is sent to Parse.ly indicating for how many of the past 15 seconds the visitor was active. A visitor’s “activity” is defined by a bevy of browser and mobile phone actions, included scrolling, swiping, tapping, and clicking.

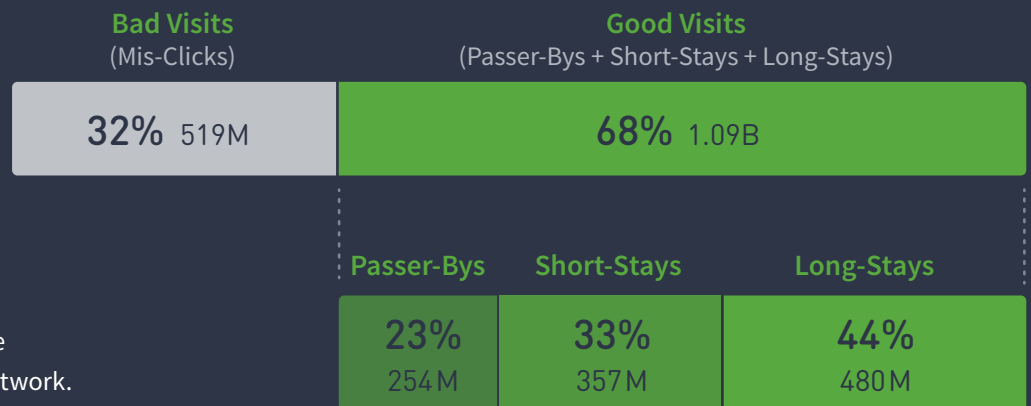
A typical visitor might have any number of heartbeat events, ranging up into the tens or hundreds. Essentially, the heartbeats operate as a “pseudo page view”, indicating a deeper level of engagement with content, even though, technically speaking, all the content is on a “single page”. This much more closely models the way people actually use our modern content-rich web.

FOUR KINDS OF SITE VISITS

To better understand engaged time in this study, we’ve grouped visits by their duration and categorized them into Good and Bad Visits defined at the 15 second duration.



ENGAGED TIME BREAKDOWN



The Take-Away

Bad Visits are dragging down average engaged time numbers across the network.

Engaged Time Averages

Engaged time for the average **Visit** overall

56 seconds

Engaged time for the average **Bad Visit**

5 seconds

Engaged time for the average **Good Visit**

81 seconds

(44% higher than the average overall)

Understanding Good versus Bad Visits

If Bad Visits can be explained by mechanisms unrelated to the content itself (e.g. site design, site performance, user device, traffic referrer, or visitor loyalty), then perhaps we can safely say that site-wide and even post-level averages are severely understating the “typical” engagement levels for “good” clicks to online content.

In other words, we might be able to explain Bad Visits by other means than “users don’t engage with online content”. Perhaps it’s just that tracking methodologies mix “junk” traffic with the real engagement, which drags the averages down.

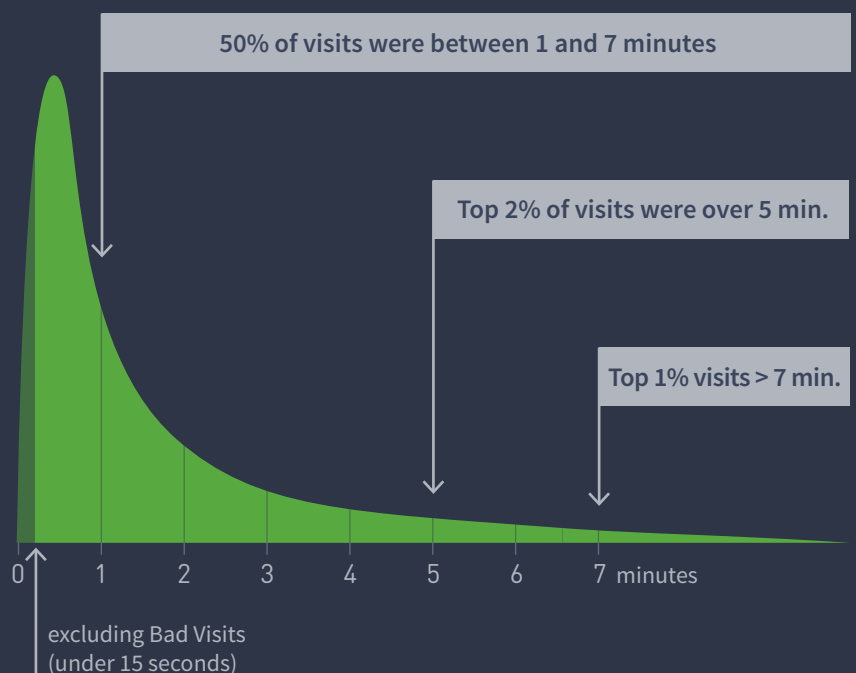
Especially since almost as many visitors are doing Long-Stays as Mis-Clicks, and when you add the Short-Stays and Long-Stays together, you have many more visits than the Mis-Clicks.

USING ENGAGED TIME TO DETECT DROP-OFF RATE

Another way to understand engaged time is via percentiles. Based on our analysis, the top 50% of sessions, after excluding Bad Visits, have between one and seven minutes of engagement.

We therefore have a reasonable definition of “engagement drop-off rate”. For a given post, the maximum reasonable Internet user engagement we can expect is seven minutes; the reasonable minimum is around 15 seconds. This is true across all publisher content, as far as we can tell.

Therefore, we can learn a lot by what causes users to engage beyond 15 seconds and toward seven minutes. We presume that one reason engagement rates tend to stay in the one to four minute range has a lot to do with the content itself: not much news/entertainment/information content is actually worthy of the deepest Long-Stays. The only content that can justify it is the minority of long-form content: long text stories, long videos, and detailed interactive posts.



What's Next?

Now that we've uncovered this user behavior, we want to dig deeper into some of the causes, and how people producing content can use this information to improve their own work.

That will include:

- Proving some of our hypothesis for the cause and sources of Bad Visits.
- Providing ways to measure predicted engagement rate for certain topics, sites or event individual posts
- Highlighting the successes of Good Visits: finding what people creating sites have done to engage their readers in the ways they intended
- Connecting engaged rates with monetization efforts. If engagement is key, so is applying it to your business

Report Methodology

Our study involved **1.6 billion** content sessions analyzed in detail over six months. These sessions were done by **467 million unique visitors** who spent over **25 million hours** reading/watching content across the Parse.ly network in this period. All of this activity centered around **18 million publisher posts**, which can be text articles, slideshows, videos, or other similar forms of unique content.

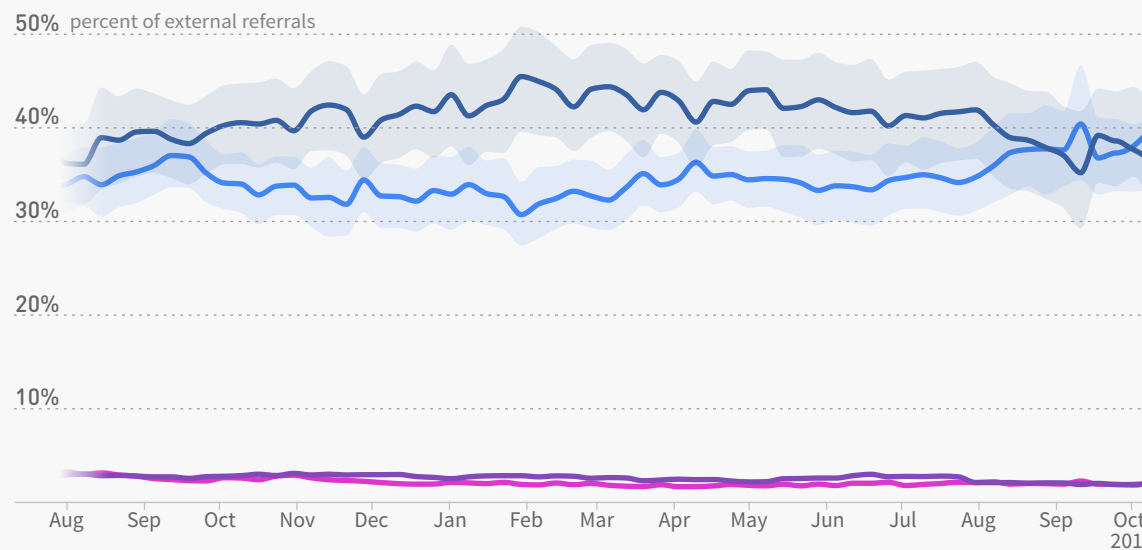
Exclusions from this report:

- Excludes Google AMP traffic
- Excludes Facebook Instant Articles traffic
- Excludes native iOS and Android traffic
- Excludes publishers that have turned off engaged time
- Excludes publishers who choose not to be part of network dataset
- Excludes articles where no engaged time was tracked at all

Top referrers in the Parse.ly network

Taking a broader look at external referral traffic across our whole network, the Parse.ly referral dashboard allows you to track changes of the biggest referrers over time. View more referrers and dive into more detail at:

www.parse.ly/referrer-dashboard



Top referrers by external referral contribution on October 9, 2017

- Google Search* (40%)
- Facebook (36%)
- Yahoo! (2.0%)
- Twitter (1.8%)



The confidence range associated with a referral source depicts the percentage of potential referral traffic across the entire online publishing industry.

* Traffic from Google AMP is not currently included in Google Search.

About Parse.ly

Parse.ly empowers companies to understand, own and improve digital audience engagement through data, so they can ensure the work they do makes the impact it deserves. Our clients, who include some of the largest media companies in the world, harness their content's potential through our real-time and historical analytics dashboard, API, and data pipeline.



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