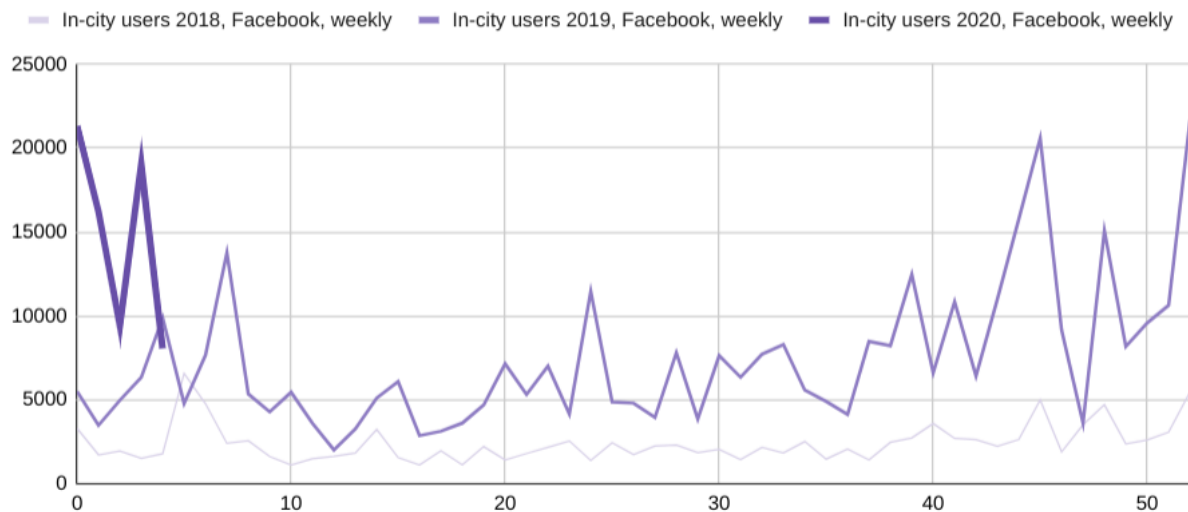


Measuring local users

Because local users matter more for membership

Brian Boyer, 2020/02/06

This will be useful to you if: You are using Google Analytics and wish to measure local audiences, either by city or by state.



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Why did we make this report?

First, some background. We were beginning a project to increase our readership, specifically, several online advertising campaigns. One measure of success would be an increase in traffic.

But not all traffic is useful. We're member-supported local news organizations, and if people are going to donate, they're probably local. So we wanted an easy way to separate local visitors from the rest.

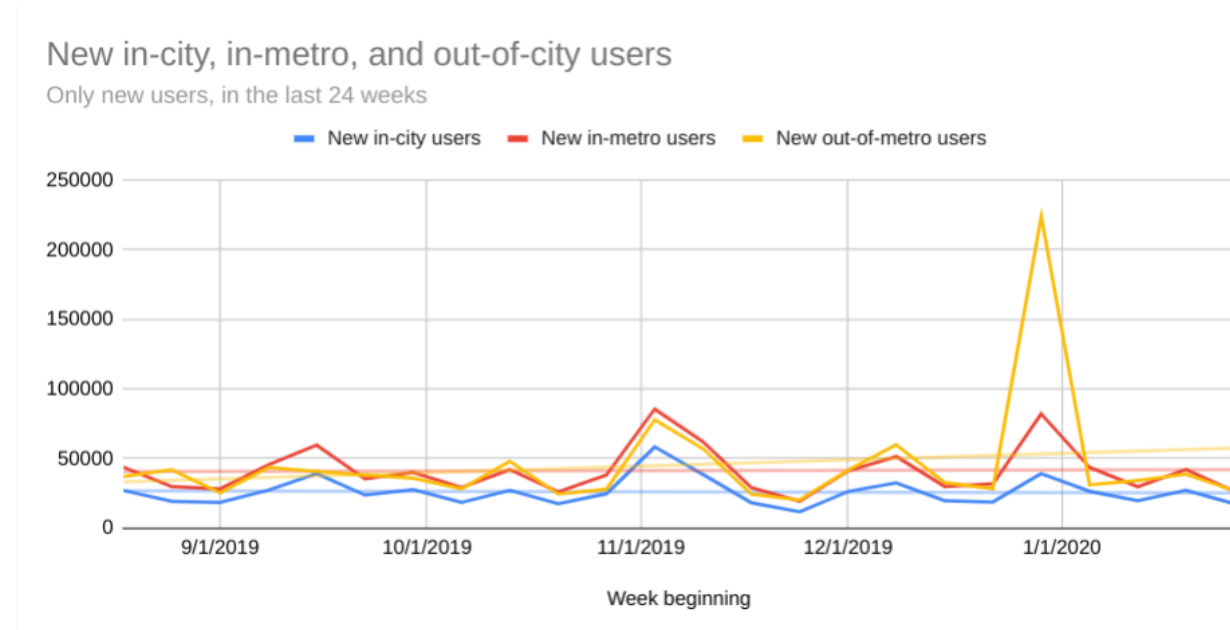
Additionally, our ads would run on Instagram and Facebook, so we were curious if our ad campaigns would have a significant effect on our traffic from Facebook. (I honestly can't say if this is true, but we've been told that when you advertise, your posts have an increased reach.)

Finally, although it's possible to find this information in the Google Analytics user interface, it's not easy, and it's not pretty. I'm not saying these charts are beautiful, but they do a good job answering our questions.

The report

The local users report is a set of charts that present our site traffic from a handful of different angles. There are two versions of the report, differentiating users [by city](#) and [by state](#).

The first two charts break down traffic by locals vs. non-locals.

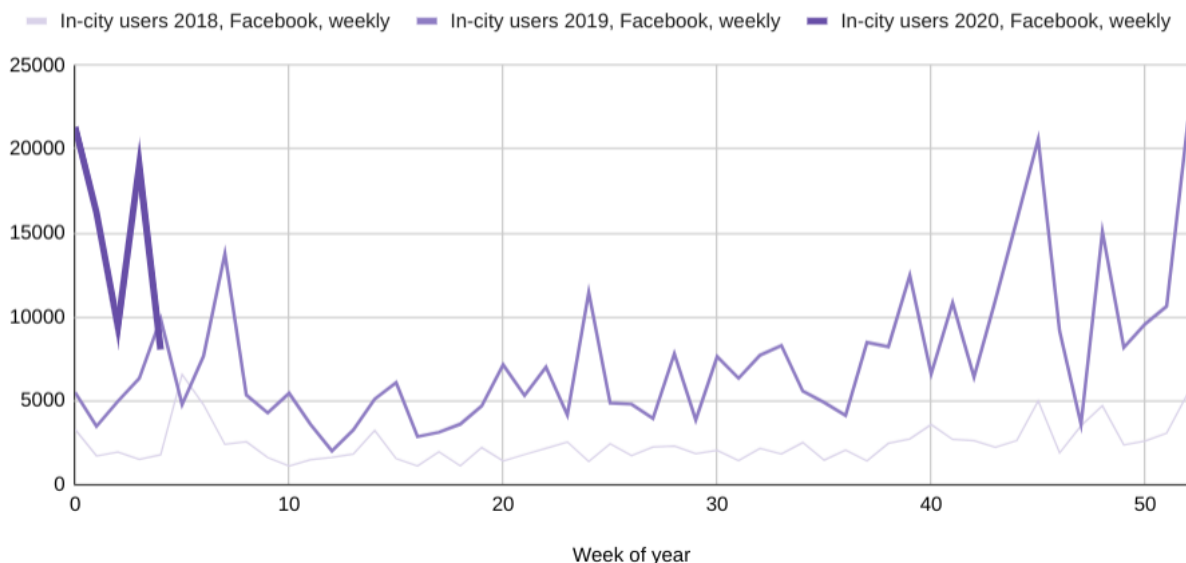


(The yellow spike is a massive increase in out-of-metro users reading an article that goes viral every year around Christmastime. It's a lovely example of useless traffic, IMO.)

The next three charts show year-on-year traffic for local users. Two of those charts are limited to only users who visited us via Facebook. The monthly numbers are more illustrative of overall trends, but we also made a weekly version because we're impatient.

Chart: Year-on-year in-city users from Facebook, weekly

Users in our city who visited via Facebook



(As you can see, traffic from Facebook has increased significantly, beginning in late 2019. This may validate the hypothesis that giving Facebook money will increase your traffic from Facebook. Great.)

How to use this yourself

Make a copy of [our report](#), and follow the directions in the Config tab (highlighted in yellow). You can find the appropriate values for your View ID and City/Metro/Region in Google Analytics.

You can also automate this report to run on a schedule (directions in the Config tab). Since this is reporting weekly data, I'd set it to run weekly, early on Monday mornings. But it'll work on any day/time you want.

How it works

We're using the [Google Analytics Spreadsheet Add-on](#) to export the data. The add-on has its own configuration tab in the spreadsheet, called Report Configuration. (There are a *lot* of tabs in this spreadsheet -- it's highlighted in blue.)

When you tell the add-on to run its reports, it generates new tabs for each column in the configuration. The tabs named "tidy data" reference the add-on generated tabs, and, well, tidy up the data.

The charts reference the “tidy” tabs for their data.

If you want to fiddle with this report, I **strongly recommend** getting to know the add-on in a brand-new spreadsheet. Start from scratch, just to get the hang of it.

Why? Well, there’s one other awesome (overly-clever?) thing happening here. These reports are built to be future-proof, which means that none of the dates are hard-coded. They’re all generated by functions and math and stuff, and date math is a pain-in-the-ass.

And in case that didn’t complicate things too much, the tabs themselves have dates in the names, so how do the “tidy” tabs know where to look for their data when the next year begins? They’re using a delightfully opaque function called INDIRECT that lets you specify the cell you’re referencing as a string.

fx	=INDIRECT(B\$1&"!B"&\$A2+16)				
	A	B	C	D	
1	Week of year	In-city users 2018,	In-city users 2019,	In-city users 2020, Face	
2	0	3299	5508	21313	
3	1	1724	3479	16195	
4	2	1952	4975	9433	
5	3	1523	6335	19008	

Yes, this got weird, fast. But that’s what you get for building fancy stuff inside Google Spreadsheets. So, yeah, I’d get familiar with how the add-on works before digging into my weird formulas and stuff.

What’s the upside? You can copy this spreadsheet, change three variables in the Config tab, and you’ve got a working, automatable report that will run until the cows come home.

Who are you? What’s Memberkit?

I’m [Brian Boyer](#). I used to be the VP of Product and People at Spirited Media. We were the home to [The Incline](#), [Denverite](#) and [Billy Penn](#). In 2019, Spirited was broken up. But -- and this is where it gets weird -- we had just completed [an accelerator program](#) and had received a grant to help our membership programs. So, I teamed up with Ashley Dean and Dave Burdick of Denverite, and Danya Henninger of Billy Penn to just do the project anyway.

This document and accompanying report are [one of many outcomes of our project](#), and we wanted to share what we learned.

Finally, Memberkit is a snazzy name I thought of a few months ago. Seemed like a good name for a membership toolkit! It's not a company, or software, or anything organized.

[Memberkit 1.0](#)

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