

Splunk® at SurveyMonkey

Optimizing customer experience through deep insights on site usage



“We’re spending less with Splunk than we did for our other tools and we’re getting far greater value. We can share Splunk and the data we capture among all our groups which increases our efficiency and provides a central resource for all.”

Elena Verna
 Director of Business Intelligence, SurveyMonkey

OVERVIEW

INDUSTRY

- Online surveys and market research

SPLUNK USE CASES

- Business intelligence and metrics tracking
- Enhanced site monitoring and resource allocation
- Real-time error reporting and exception monitoring
- User experience optimization
- SEO / site testing optimization

BUSINESS IMPACT

- Easier integration of data flows from acquired companies
- Inform decisions regarding foreign site expansion
- Increase ease and effectiveness of A/B site testing
- Reduce licensing costs by 45% for business intelligence group
- Improve localized content and SEO optimization

DATA SOURCES

- Apache, clickstream logs
- Server, desktop, database and application activity logs
- Java applications and application servers
- .Net applications and servers
- System metrics

The Business

Founded in 1999, SurveyMonkey is the world’s largest survey company, helping customers collect more than 1.5 million online survey responses every day. The company’s customers include 99% of the Fortune 500, as well as academic institutions, small businesses, and civic and government organizations around the world.

Challenges

With a memorable company name and an easy-to-use product that’s free for many and affordable for commercial users, SurveyMonkey has claimed a major share of a highly competitive marketplace, experiencing continuously strong growth. This growth has been spurred by several key acquisitions—including Wufoo, Zoomerang, ZoomPanel, and TrueSample—and the introduction of new features and products such as SurveyMonkey Audience, an on-demand group of millions of survey respondents. In addition, the company is also expanding globally at nearly twice the pace of its domestic market.

However, this rapid growth has posed new challenges for Survey Monkey’s business intelligence and site engineering groups. “We were using SiteCatalyst and Google Analytics, but those tools just couldn’t give us the granularity that our users needed,” explains SurveyMonkey Director of Business Intelligence Elena Verna. “At a growing company like ours, engineering resources can get stretched pretty thin, so we needed a more flexible way to drill down into our data and associate activity on our web site with business results.”

Enter Splunk

SurveyMonkey’s engineering group used the free version of Splunk for about a year before the business intelligence organization also joined in. “We decided that we could share the cost of a Splunk license with our engineering group and end our license costs for SiteCatalyst,” notes SurveyMonkey Senior Business Intelligence Analyst Eric Hergenrader. “Splunk made more sense for us because we could share our data with any team that needed access and spread the cost as well.”

The company now uses Splunk to pull all logs and other system information into the firm’s central SQL Server data warehouse where it is shared via reports generated using SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) and made accessible via SharePoint.

Breakthroughs

Rationalize tools and save on licensing

Between SurveyMonkey’s business intelligence and site engineering groups alone, the firm was using three different analysis tools and paying separate licensing costs for each. “It was not only costing us about 45% more, but we were not getting the value we should have,” Hergenrader notes. “Splunk makes it easier to share critical resources.”

According to Verna, “SiteCatalyst, for instance, required us to use JavaScript tagging to collect visitor data, which was a big pain point for us. As the pace of business increased it became more and more difficult to associate web traffic with business results.”

SurveyMonkey was able to replicate the functionality of other tools within Splunk and thereby eliminate them. “We were using Mixpanel for funnel tracking, but saw we could get the same functionality in Splunk with even greater granularity,” says Hergenrader.

Enhanced site monitoring and resource allocation

The firm uses Splunk to track certain user activity to determine where visitors come from, such as survey pages, search engines, or affiliate links. SurveyMonkey writes the tracking information to its data warehouse.

When free users sign up for paid accounts, SurveyMonkey sees the origin of the conversion across multiple channels, allowing them to better allocate marketing resources. “We can see every touch point that users have with our site and determine which ones really drive sign-ups and conversions,” notes Hergenrader.

SEO optimization

SurveyMonkey has always had a global appeal, but primarily in English-speaking countries. The firm discovered that in order to attract users to sign up for paid accounts, it needs to translate the site and publish it in the local language on a country-specific domain. In order to determine whether this costly expense makes sense, the firm uses Splunk to support its SEO manager in weighing the pros and cons of localization. “We use Splunk to look at page view volumes for different countries we are targeting and estimate the traffic spikes we might receive if we were to move all of those surveys to a country-specific domain,” Hergenrader says.

Acquisition integration support

Splunk has made it easier for SurveyMonkey to integrate new companies and products into its operation. “We don’t have to do a lot of extra work,” Hergenrader observes. “We just set up a new index in Splunk so we can segment that data more easily.”

SurveyMonkey is using Splunk to capture information on all requests processed through its load balancer from every company and new product under its umbrella. “All of the data is already in there; I can just search on the Wufoo index, for instance, and create the exact same reporting I would for SurveyMonkey,” says Hergenrader. “With another tool, we’d have to sign a new licensing contract, get our engineers to work to create a new set of data tags and hope that we don’t break anything on the site.”

Increase site testing effectiveness

Like many firms, SurveyMonkey has a team devoted to conducting A/B testing of new site features and capabilities. This test team relies on information collected by the BI group to help refine its testing and track results. “They will come to us to learn, for example, how many visitors from Canada are visiting our pricing page each day,” says Hergenrader. “Our A/B test planning group has really benefitted from Splunk by knowing exactly how many people we can expect to fall into a certain test group. We can anticipate traffic volume and limit the size of a test population if needed.”

Engineering group shares Splunk

SurveyMonkey’s site engineering group actively uses Splunk for real-time error reporting, exception monitoring and overall debugging. When the company pushes releases to the site, the engineering team can monitor them on the fly to ensure optimal performance and uptime. Hergenrader explains, “Before Splunk, it was more a matter of hope and pray. Now, if something is amiss, they know more precisely how far to roll back. They know within seconds or minutes whether something is going to work.”

Free Download

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