Sorting Out Separation Website Statistics

Department for Work & Pensions

December 2012 to December 2015

This paper provides information about visitors and their use of the Help and Support for Separated Families (HSSF) Sorting out Separation website www.sortingoutseparation.org.uk from its launch in December 2012 to December 2015. It updates a previous publication which looked at these issues for the first year of the Website's operation. The Website's main objective is to co-ordinate existing support services to better support separating and separated parents. It helps parents prioritise their needs and signposts them to relevant expert help.

Main stories about website users

Users of the website

- Total users – all visits including multiple visits from the same person
- Unique users – all people using the site – not multiple visits

Since the Website's launch in December 2012 to December 2015:

- Nearly 266,000 unique users visited the website resulting in
- Just over 359,000 total user visits
- Graph omits two marketing spikes in 2015

Total and unique users to website
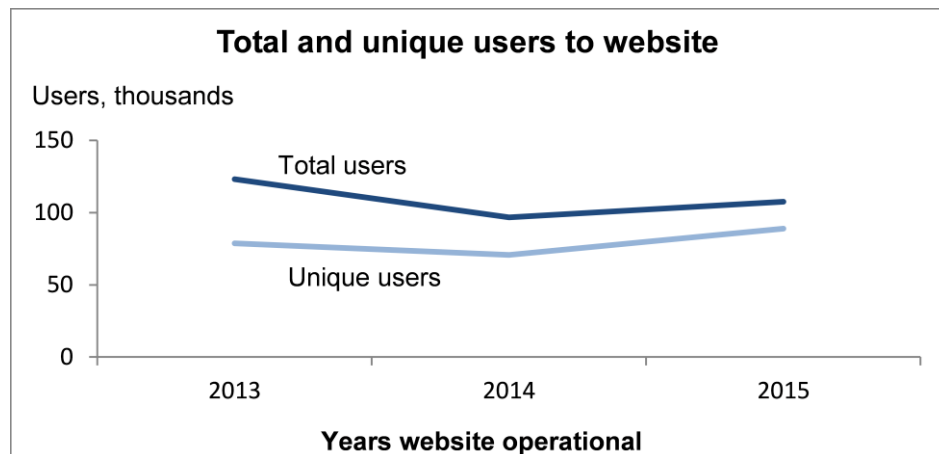
Website engagement - where users go beyond the home page to access support services

Again since the Website's launch in December 2012 to December 2015:

- Just over 61,000 unique users engaged with the website with
- Nearly 72,000 total user visits to support services
- Graph omits two marketing spikes in 2015
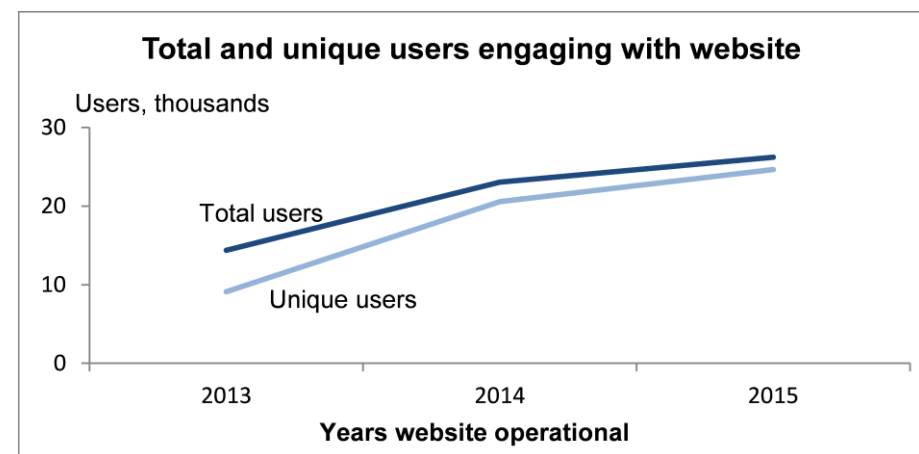
Total and unique users engaging with website

At a glance

What you need to know

Government policy is to encourage separated parents to make their own, family-based arrangements wherever possible and to be able to access the support they need to achieve that. The Sorting out Separation Website is one of the key tools available to provide support on a range of issues prior to, during and after a relationship break-up. It acts as an online information and support hub for:

- separating and separated couples with and without children
- those contemplating separation and
- friends or family.

In November 2014 embedded traffic stopped being the main source of traffic to the website when direct traffic took over from embedded traffic. From mid-2014 to to-date DWP is encouraging provider websites to adopt links to the website instead of embedding it. This is because if visitors land on any external website hosting the embedded www.sortingoutseparation.org.uk website they are counted as visiting the site irrespective of whether they intended to view that host sites webpage.

Website development and collecting these statistics

Website build was outsourced to a contractor which initially collected the statistics on behalf of the Child Maintenance Group (CMG) in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The work was subsequently awarded to a secondary contractor. The DWP took over the collection of data in early 2015. The maintenance and building of the website came in house in March 2016.

The statistics used here were collected both on a monthly basis and historically using Google Analytics to deliver monthly reporting to December 2015. Until recently data was collected by companies contracted by DWP. Early in 2016 DWP took over this role.

Historical data to January 2013 has been collected using a Google Analytics account. Data from February 2013 to December 2015 has been collected using a GA Premium account which delivers true numbers.

Deriving website counts over time can be imprecise because both:

1. Website URL addresses can be changed or updated over time
2. Numbers of Website URL addresses linked to items or a page etc. can increase or decrease over time.

Numbers of visitors and users to the Sorting out Separation website

Monthly total and unique user numbers to website

Users, thousands
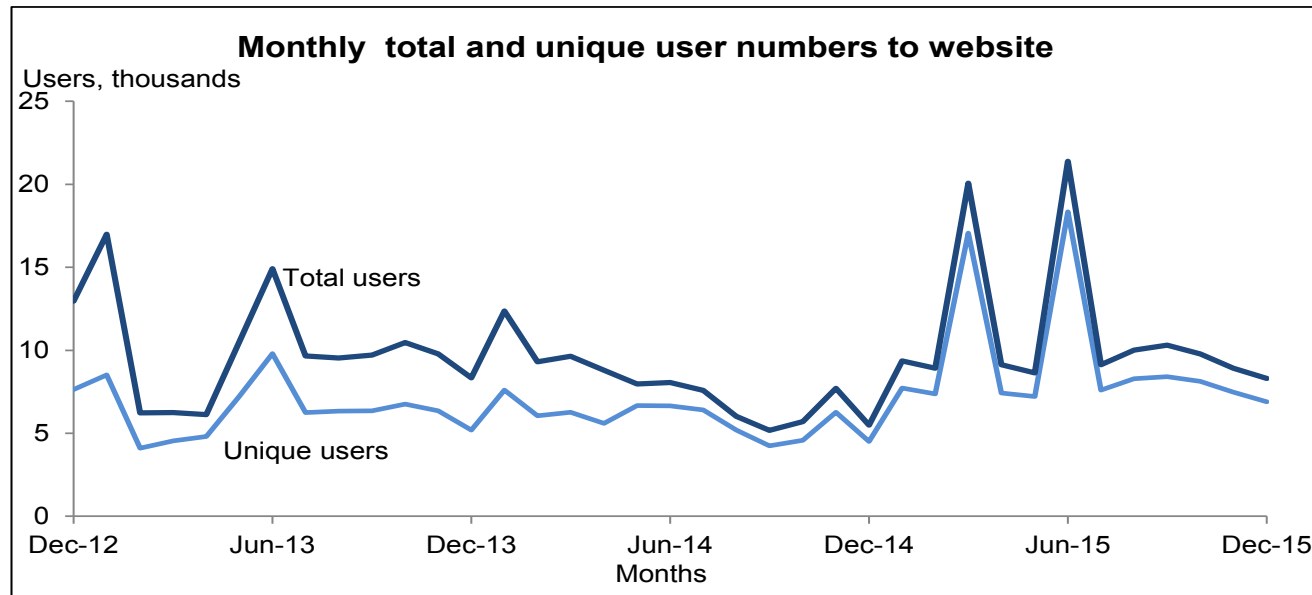
When users use / visit the Website they can visit once or many times. To report users Google analytics provides statistics on both "Total user" and "Unique user" numbers:

- **Total users** are defined as **all visits to use** the Website or any webpage hosting an embedded or linked version of the Website. **This includes multiple visits from the same person.**
- **Unique users** are defined as **the total number of people** who have visited the Sorting out Separation website or any webpage hosting an embedded or linked version of the Website. **It does not include multiple visits from the same person.**

Total/unique user numbers have fluctuated over the three year period from launch to December 2015. To an extent this can be explained by:

- Promotional activities - highest volumes tend to occur due to promotional activities e.g. the highest volumes were in March and June 2015, both of these months coincided with promotional campaigns on Facebook and Google.
- Seasonal trends - fluctuating monthly user numbers tend to decrease toward the end of the year (the increase in November 2014 was an exception mainly through a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) promotion).
- Removal from websites – the Sorting out Separation website was embedded on two websites and embedding was later removed from these in 2014. The removal from the two websites, accounts for the drop in visitor numbers in August 2014.

Ignoring the fluctuations, it is apparent that total user numbers exhibited a decreasing trend over the first two years with less of a decrease for unique user numbers. Total user numbers appear to have returned to an approximate steady state in 2015 and have been just over 9,000 per month, less for unique users. This implies fewer multiple uses of the site.

Engaging with the Sorting out Separation website

Once a member of the target audience visits the Website homepage, the aim is to get them to engage with the Website – that is go beyond the homepage to a range of key support services.

Monthly total and unique users who engage with website

Users, thousands

Total users

Unique users

Months
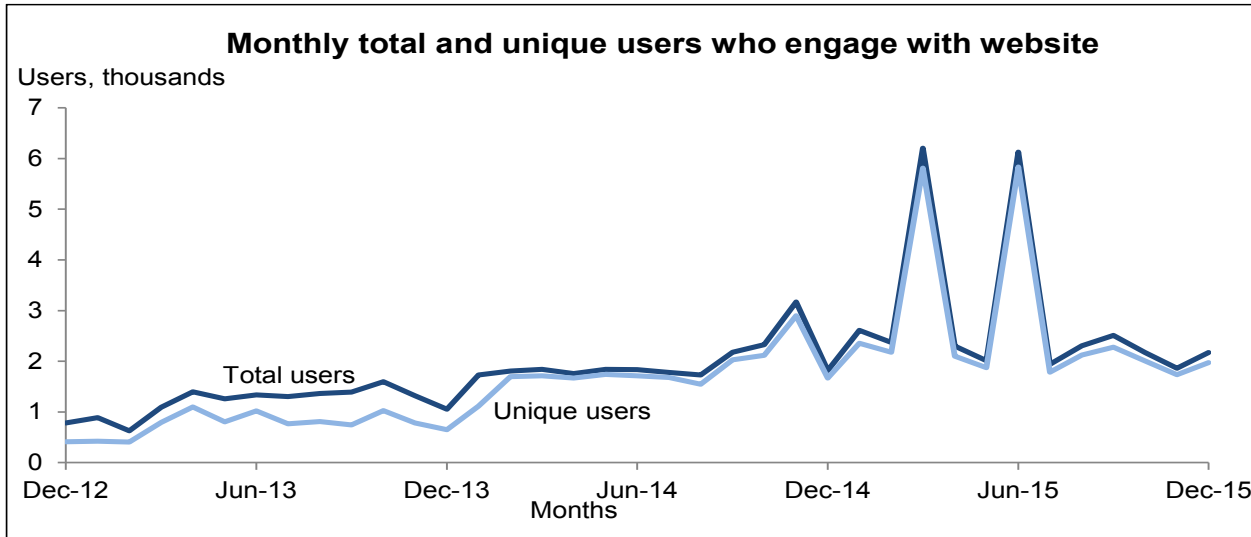
Total and unique users that engaged with the website remained approximately constant to Spring 2014. This then increased towards the end of 2014 and thereafter maintained an approximate steady state, ignoring the increases due to the two promotions represented by peaks in activity in March and June 2015

This illustrates that engagement was lower over the majority of the first two years but then increased prior to 2015 and remained approximately constant to December 2015.

Conversion rate for total and unique users

Conversion rate
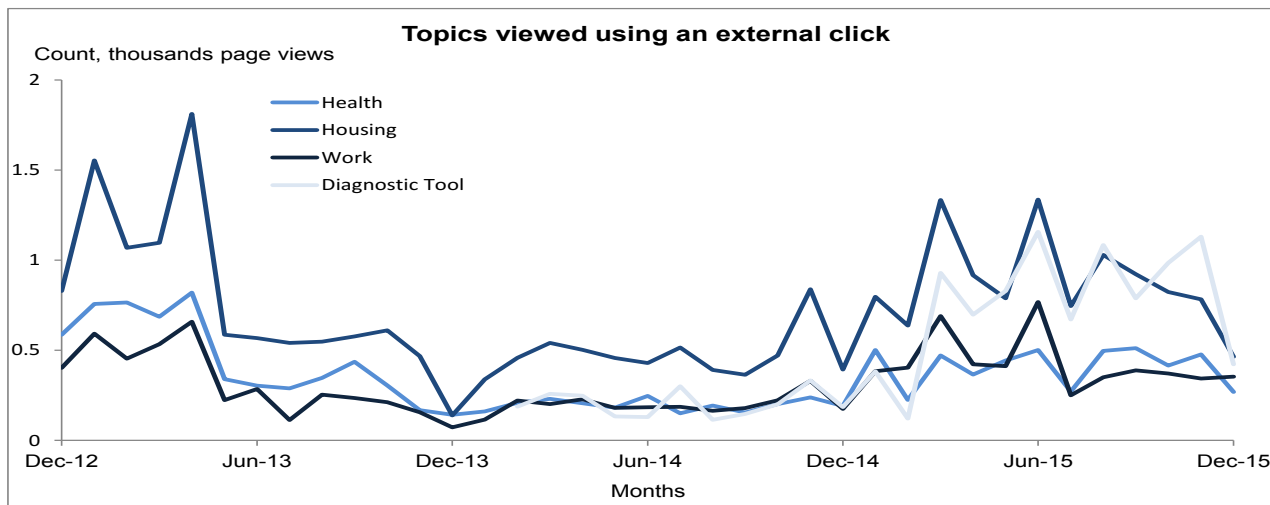
Unique users

Total users

Months
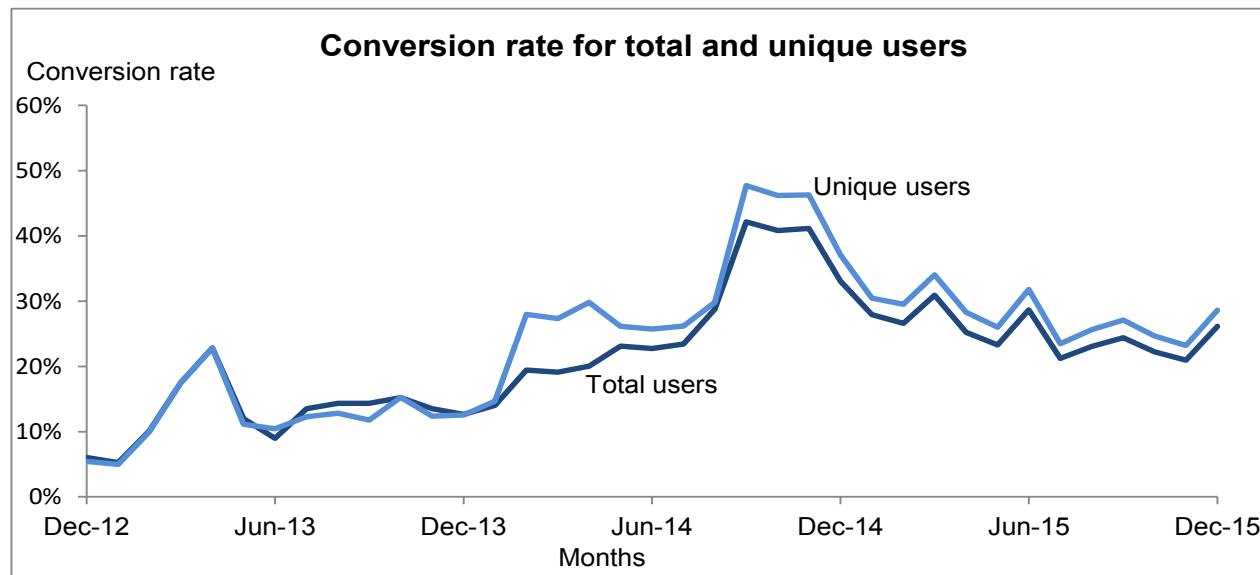
To look at how effectively engagement is working, we divide **engaged** total and unique users by total users and total unique users respectively - this is called the conversion rate.

The conversion rates for both total and unique users have mostly mirrored each other. The average conversion rates for both total and unique users over the three years have risen to about 30% from nearly 6% at December 2012 when the Website was launched. It was 13% at December 2013 and 33% at December 2014.

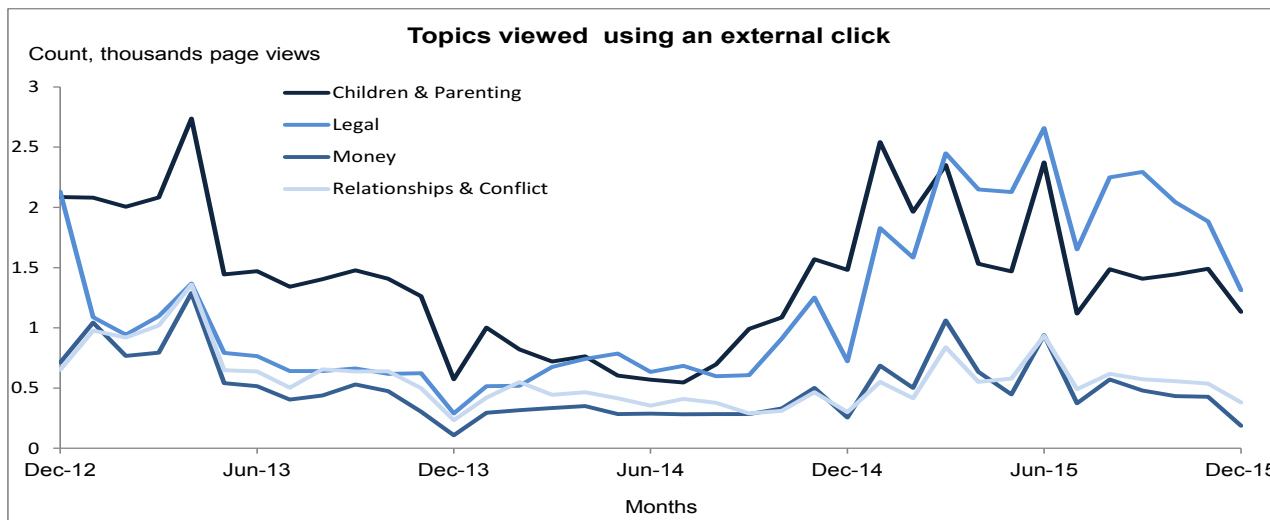# Signposting - topics (expert help) viewed via an external click

One of the main aims of the Website is to co-ordinate existing support services to better support separating and separated parents and to enable parents to navigate more easily to the most relevant support to meet their immediate and longer term needs. Over the three years from December 2012 to December 2015, just over 61,000 unique users and nearly 72,000 total users engaged with the website. They accessed just over 234,000 external links to organisations offering support services. Similar to the 2012 report this suggests that the most engaged users go on to find sources of support as a result of using the website.

Topics viewed using an external click

Count, thousands page views

Legend: Health, Housing, Work, Diagnostic Tool

Months

The Sorting out Separation website covered a variety of topics for which customers could access support. From the end of 2012 to the end of 2015 the links available comprised:

- ❖ Children & Parenting,
- ❖ Health
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Legal
- ❖ Money
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ Work and Benefits

At the start of 2014 a new home page was developed in addition to a diagnostic tool

Topics viewed using an external click

Count, thousands page views

Legend: Children & Parenting, Legal, Money, Relationships & Conflict

Months

Nearly one in four (22%) of users who selected external links browsed for information on Children and Parenting, followed by nearly one in five (19%) for legal information. 15% browsed for information on the Homepage and slightly smaller numbers searched for information on Housing (11%), Relationship & Conflict (9%) and Money (8%). Health, Work and the Diagnostic tool were browsed by 6%, 5% and 5% respectively by users.

It is apparent there has been substantial dynamism within and between topics over the three year period. In general topics decreased to a minimum over the first two years and subsequently increased over the final year. However, some topics have changed relative order in the last year with respect to the first two years.

Ways of accessing the Sorting out Separation website – embedded and linked sites

The Sorting out Separation website relies on attracting a variety of service providers agreeing to host and promote the service – these comprise Third Sector voluntary and community groups, e.g. mediators, collaborative lawyers etc. as well as brand and stakeholder partners. Since website launch to December 2015 approximately 630 different websites have either embedded or linked to the Sorting out Separation website.

Embedded website visit statistics

Website hits, hundreds
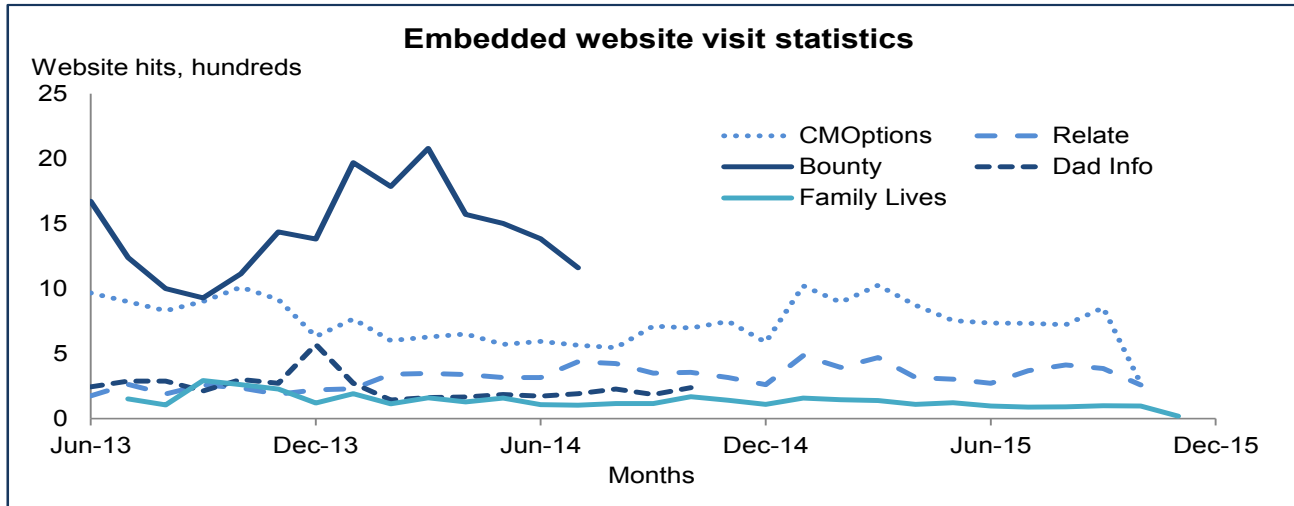
The first graph shows the top five embedded websites where data was available over the three year period. Statistics ceased from Bounty in July 2014 and in October 2014 Dadinfo ceased embedding and only linked to the website.

CM Options is by far outperforming other Websites. This is because CM Options is a DWP website and is promoted extensively and effectively to a greater degree than other hosting websites. The other two prominent websites are Relate and Family lives.

Linked website visit statistics
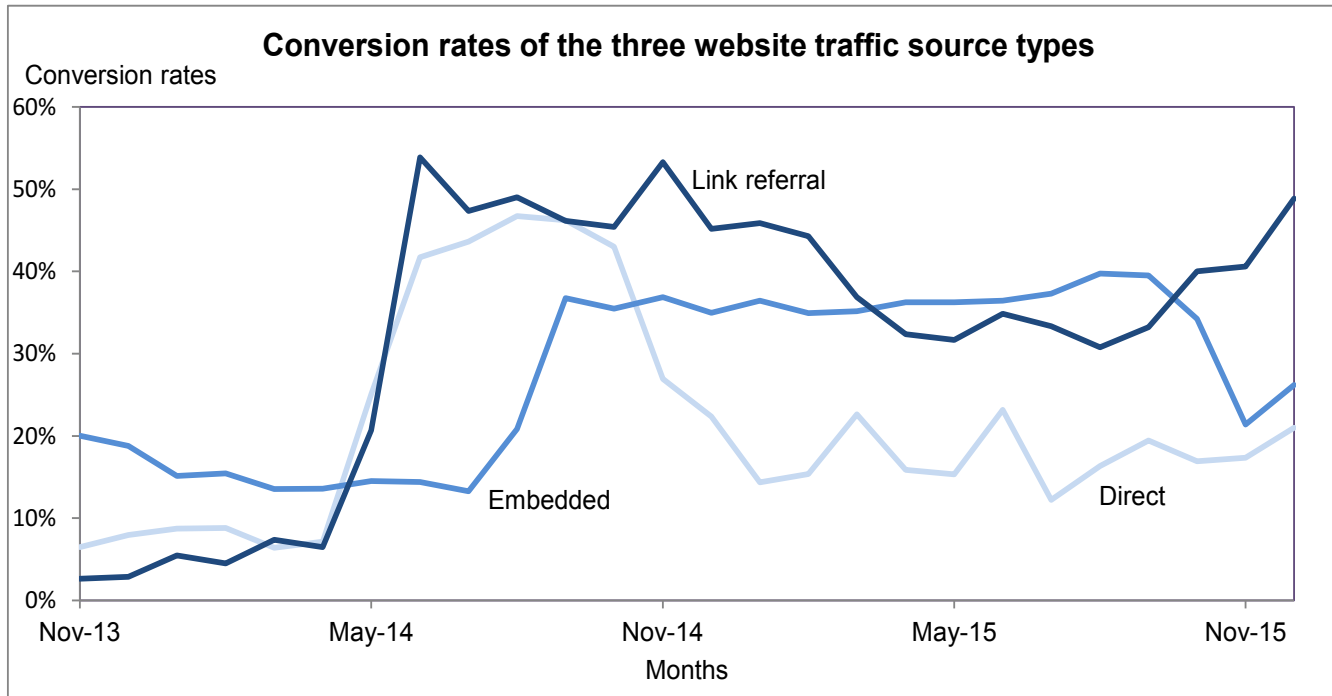
Website hits, hundreds
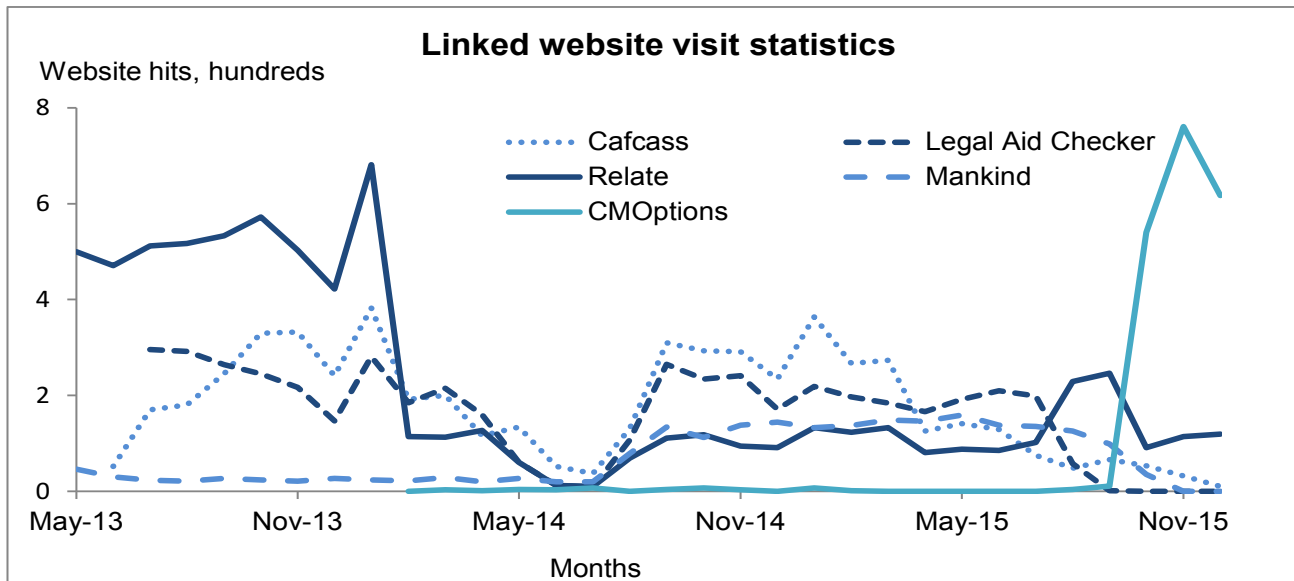
This second graph shows the top five linked websites. It is apparent that website hits for Cafcass, Relate and Legal Aid Checker fell greatly toward mid-2014. Whilst hits to these sites increased again in 2014, they with Mankind fell to virtually zero at the end of 2015 with the exception of Relate.

A major impact has been with CM Options which after embedding was dropped in late 2015 and, consequently rose through linking access.

The drop in referrals does not necessarily mean websites have stopped referring. To know where a user has come from, 3rd party tracking is required, i.e. cookies. IPhones now turn off 3rd party tracking as by default and more users are also turning this off on their own devices, making it harder to track referrals.

Website rates of engagement

Conversion rates of the three website traffic source types

Conversion rates

- 60%
- 50%
- 40%
- 30%
- 20%
- 10%
- 0%

Nov-13   May-14   Nov-14   May-15   Nov-15

Months

Link referral

Embedded

Direct

In this graph it is apparent that toward the end of 2013 the three conversion rates remained approximately constant but increased greatly in early 2014 as engagement increased.

The conversion rate order for traffic types has been dynamic over the period illustrated. From mid-2014 the link conversion rate has in the main dominated followed by embedded.

The increase in the embedded engagement rate mid-2014 is associated with one website removing the embedded website. This left the majority of visitors coming from CM Options who were already engaged with the process. When these CM Options visitors were counted as Link referral it was apparent that CM Options was skewing the conversion rate. This is why there was a like for like switch in November 2015 – when CM Options no longer used embedded sites and changed to linked only.

About these statistics

The statistics used in this paper are obtained from Google analytics which can be used to monitor website usage and provides MI.

The statistics have been collated on a monthly and historical time series basis.

Limitations of these statistics

- All figures contained within this publication are unaudited. Statistics from website launch to January 2013 were collected in Google Analytics – See following link - https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/2637192?hl=en From February 2013 a Google Analytics GA Premium account was used to deliver 100% statistics.
- Website wide statistics are measured consistently, for example total users and unique users, and hence are robust. Sub-website measures, for example Topics, can be subject to change depending on how measurement is defined.
- Website URL addresses can change over time and Website URL addresses can be added-in or dropped over time making it difficult to measure time-series counts
- When measuring topic interest it is counted at the topic level and for all the differing URLs within the topic irrespective of direct or indirect access.
- Annual total visitor and unique visitor trends in addition to engagement (Page-1) are less pronounced for 2015 when the impact of the two marketing events are left out.
- Engagement rates (Page-6) – Increase in embedded engagement rate early 2014 is linked with one website removing the embedded website. This left the majority of visitors coming from CM Options who were already engaged with the process. When these visitors were extracted from embedded and redefined as referral traffic it is apparent that CM Options was skewing the engagement rate.
- Calculations for traffic type statistics and conversion rates for November 2013 to January 2014 were revisited and revised. Further historical statistics could not be revised because of changes made to website tracking in October 2013.
- If a user, by chance lands on the homepage through embedding within a host site that incidence is counted regardless. This could contribute to an over estimate of usage.
- Some traffic, approximately 10%, comes from non UK users, mainly English speaking countries. This could contribute to an over estimate of usage.

Where to find out more

This publication updates previous statistics released as an ad hoc publication which can be found here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/289442/sorting-out-separation-web-app.pdf

More information about the government's proposals for child maintenance can be found here:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/176902/strengthening-families.pdf.pdf