

How to Know What's Actually Working in Your Online Business

You're tracking numbers. Watching stats. Checking dashboards. And you've got data coming at you from everywhere. Website traffic. Social media followers. Email list size. Engagement rates.

Click-through rates. Time on page. Bounce rates. It's a lot. And somewhere in all of that data is supposed to be the answer to whether what you're doing is actually working. But here's the problem.

Most of those numbers don't tell you anything useful. They look impressive. They make you feel like you're making progress. But they don't actually connect to the thing that matters, which is whether your business is growing. Whether you're getting closer to your goals. Whether what you're doing today is going to result in revenue tomorrow.

You can have a lot of traffic and no sales. A big email list and no engagement. Tons of followers and no customers. And if you're measuring the wrong things, you won't even realize you're spinning your wheels until months have gone by and nothing has actually changed.

The Vanity Metrics Trap

Vanity metrics are numbers that look good but don't mean anything. They're easy to track and easy to grow, which is why people focus on them. But they don't correlate with business success. You can have high vanity metrics and a failing business. Or low vanity metrics and a thriving one.

Follower count is a vanity metric. You can have 50,000 followers and make no money because none of them are buyers. Or you can have 500 followers who are all engaged potential customers and make six figures. The number itself doesn't tell you anything about the quality of your audience or whether they're actually interested in what you're selling.

Website traffic is often a vanity metric too. Sure, you want people visiting your site. But if they're bouncing immediately or coming from sources that will never convert, high traffic is just high traffic. It's not progress. It's just noise in your analytics that makes you feel good without actually moving your business forward.

Even email list size can be a vanity metric if those subscribers never open your emails. You could have 10,000 people on your list and a 5% open rate, which means 9,500 of those subscribers might as well not exist.

They're dead weight. But you're counting them as an asset and making decisions based on having a "big list" when the reality is

you have a small engaged audience buried in a big list of people who don't care.

What Real Progress Actually Looks Like

Real progress is measured by action, not attention. It's not about how many people see your stuff. It's about how many people respond to it. How many people engage. How many people take the next step you're asking them to take.

If you post something and people comment with thoughtful responses, that's real engagement. If you send an email and people reply to it, that's real engagement. If you put out an offer and people ask questions about it, that's real engagement. These things tell you that what you're saying is resonating. That people are paying attention. That your message is landing.

Conversely, if you're posting and getting likes but no comments, that's not engagement. That's people scrolling past and tapping a button. If you're sending emails and people are opening them but not clicking or replying, they're not engaged.

They're skimming. If you're putting out content and nobody's asking you anything or reaching out or taking action, you don't have an audience problem. You have a message problem.

Real progress is also measured by movement through your funnel. Are people going from awareness to consideration to decision? Are they signing up for your lead magnet? Opening your welcome sequence? Clicking through to your offers? Booking calls? Buying? Each of those steps tells you something useful about whether your system is working.

The Simple Self-Check Method

Here's how you figure out what's actually working. Stop looking at your dashboards for a minute and ask yourself three questions. First question: Are people responding to me? Not liking or following or subscribing.

Responding. Replying to your emails. Commenting with real thoughts. Sending you messages. Asking questions. If yes, something is working. You're saying things that matter to people. If no, you've got a message problem or an audience problem, and the solution isn't more content. It's better content or a different audience.

Second question: Are people taking the action I'm asking them to take? If you're asking them to download something, are they downloading it? If you're asking them to book a call, are they booking?

If you're asking them to buy, are they buying? If the answer is yes, your offer and your call to action are working. If the answer is no,

something in your messaging or your offer isn't clear or compelling enough.

Third question: Is my business growing? Not your audience size or your traffic. Your actual business. Are you making more money this quarter than last quarter? Do you have more customers?

Are you getting more inquiries? Are opportunities increasing? If yes, whatever you're doing is working even if the metrics don't look impressive. If no, the metrics don't matter. You need to change something fundamental about your approach.

Those three questions will tell you more about what's working than any analytics dashboard. Because they're focused on outcomes, not activity. On results, not effort. On whether what you're doing is actually moving your business forward or just making you busy.

The Revenue Connection

Here's the ultimate test of whether something is working: does it connect to revenue? Not eventually. Not theoretically. Actually. Can you draw a straight line from this activity to money coming into your business?

If you're creating content, does that content lead to people joining your email list, and does your email list lead to sales? If you're posting on social media, are those posts leading to conversations

that turn into customers? If you're running ads, are those ads generating a positive return?

If you can't connect what you're doing to revenue, you're probably measuring the wrong things. You're probably focused on activities that feel productive but don't actually generate results. And you're probably getting fooled by vanity metrics that make you think you're making progress when you're not.

This doesn't mean everything you do has to immediately generate sales. You need to build awareness and trust. You need to provide value. You need to establish credibility. But even those things should connect to revenue eventually.

If you're creating content that builds awareness, that awareness should turn into subscribers. Those subscribers should turn into engaged readers. Those engaged readers should turn into customers. There should be a path.

If there's no path from what you're doing today to revenue at some point, you're not working on your business. You're working on a hobby that looks like a business.

What to Track Instead

If you're going to track numbers, track the ones that matter. Track reply rates on your emails, not just open rates. Track how many people are asking you questions or reaching out, not just how

many people are following you. Track conversion rates at each step of your funnel, not just total traffic.

Track how many sales conversations you're having. How many of those conversations turn into customers. How much revenue you're generating per customer. How long it takes to move someone from awareness to purchase. These numbers tell you what's working and what's not. They show you where the bottlenecks are in your system.

And track how you feel about your business. Are you energized by the work you're doing? Do you feel like you're moving toward your goals? Are you excited about the opportunities you're creating? Or are you exhausted and frustrated and feeling stuck? Because how you feel is often a better indicator of whether something is working than any metric could be.

When the Numbers Don't Match Reality

Sometimes your metrics will tell you one thing and your gut will tell you another. Your numbers might look good, but you're not making money. Or your numbers might look terrible, but you're actually getting results. When that happens, trust your gut. The numbers are measuring the wrong things.

Go back to the basics. Are people buying from you? Are they telling other people about you? Are you building relationships that turn into opportunities? Are you creating work you're proud of? If

yes, you're on the right track even if the metrics don't reflect it yet.
If no, the metrics don't matter.

What's actually working in your business isn't what the dashboard says. It's what your bank account says. What your customers say. What your own experience tells you. Pay attention to that. Not to the vanity metrics that make you feel good but don't change anything.