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Visitor statistics: where they are and what they mean

Panel Tools & Features

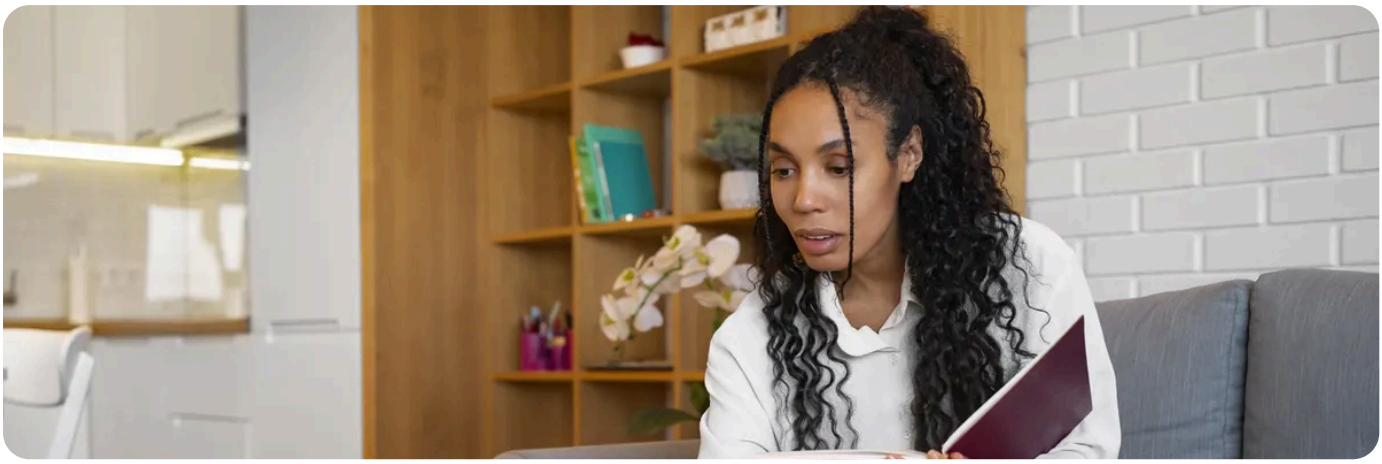
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Visitor statistics: where they are and what they mean

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The server counts everything anyone asks it for, and cPanel shows you that count without you installing a thing. Finding the numbers is not the problem. Knowing what each one is counting is. Three reports covering the same week can give three different figures, and none of them is wrong.

Where they are

All under the **Metrics** section of cPanel. The article «How to monitor your site performance in cPanel» walks through all of them; here are the ones about visitors, so you know which to open.

Report	Good for
Awstats	The monthly picture: visits, unique visitors, top pages, countries, and which sites link to you. The most complete of the ones included.
Webalizer	The same thing, simpler, with monthly graphs. If you already read Awstats you do not need both.
Visitors	The most recent visits in full detail, line by line, with IP, page, time and browser. Not for trends: for investigating one specific incident.
Bandwidth	Data transferred per month, split between web, e-mail and FTP. It measures *weight*, not how many people came.
Raw Access	The complete server log, downloadable. The source everything else is built from, for when a developer needs to go all the way down.

Nothing showing?

These reports are built from the logs at intervals, not live, so a domain you created this morning has nothing to show yet. If days pass and it is still empty, check in the **Metrics Editor** that the report is switched on for that domain, because that is where it is chosen.

Four words that do not mean the same thing

Word	What it actually counts
Hit	One file delivered. **A single page can be worth dozens of hits**: the text, every image, every stylesheet, every font, every icon. The biggest number and the least useful one.
Page view	One document opened, not counting images and the rest. This is closer to what most people mean when they say «visits».
Visit (session)	One trip through the site. The same person coming back tomorrow counts as two visits; opening ten pages in a row counts as one.
Unique visitor	One distinct source in the period. The closest thing to «how many people», and still not people: sources.

The order never changes: **hits above page views, page views above visits, visits above visitors**. If somebody shows you a spectacular traffic figure, the first question is which of the four it is.

A unique visitor is not a person.
A whole office behind one connection can count as one; the same person on their phone, their home computer and their work computer counts as three. Use it to compare one week against the next, not to tell a client how many people saw the ad.

Why these never match an external analytics tool

This is the question we get most on the subject, and the short answer is that they measure from different places. cPanel counts **at the server**, because it sees every request that arrives. An external analytics tool counts **at the browser**, because it only knows about a visit if a small piece of its code actually runs on the page. Two vantage points, each blind to things the other sees.

Reason	Which way it pushes
Bots	Search engines, link checkers, site copiers and intrusion attempts request pages all day long and never run the external tool's code. **They inflate cPanel**, and on a small site they can be most of what it shows.
Caching	A page already held in the visitor's browser, or served by a delivery network sitting in front of the site, may never reach the server at all. **Hides visits from cPanel** that the external tool still sees.
JavaScript	Anyone blocking scripts, running an ad blocker, or leaving before the page finishes loading is invisible to the external tool. **Deflates the outside number.**
What counts as traffic	Bandwidth adds e-mail and FTP, which are not site visits at all. A busy mailbox can explain usage the website cannot.

Reason	Which way it pushes
The clock	Server reports close the day in server time. An external tool usually closes in whatever timezone you picked. That alone is enough for two days never to line up exactly.

The practical rule: **compare each number against itself over time**, never against the other one. This week's Awstats against last week's Awstats tells you something. Awstats against an external tool tells you nothing, unless one of them is broken, and usually neither is.

Which number answers which question

What you want to know	Where to look
Which content people care about	Top pages, in Awstats. And, if you are going to make real decisions on it, an external tool, which filters bots for you.
Whether the plan is still enough	Bandwidth for traffic, and Resource Usage for processor and memory. Those decide it, not the visit count.
Where your visitors come from	Awstats: the sites linking to you, and search terms where they exist.
What happened at three in the morning	Visitors and Raw Access. The only two that give you the exact line, with IP and time.
Whether the spike was people or bots	Raw Access. If the lines all share one IP, or the browser names look like software names, it was not people.

An unexplained spike usually has one of three explanations.
A search engine reindexing the whole site, somebody else using your images on their site, or repeated attempts to get into your admin panel. All three show in Raw Access, and the last two are dealt with in the Security section of cPanel.

NEED A HAND?

Numbers making no sense at all? Tell us what you are looking at and we will help you read it.

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