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# Using Heat Maps to Improve Website and Email Performance

By: Rick Cohen

Don't try to beat the heat this August, embrace it! Heat maps can be a useful tool for your nonprofit to measure and improve the performance of your website and emails.

Last month, we shared an article from Maureen Maycheco of Colorado Nonprofit Association about why it's important to [avoid using too many calls to action](#) in an email. A heat map can help you identify what types of calls to action are most effective – and where to place them. A heat map will show you where the attention spans of your site visitors or email readers start to taper off, so you can adjust the format or length of your materials and/or the position of any call to action.

## Email Heat Maps

Most bulk email providers provide reports on the number of clicks on each link in mass emails you send. This information can be helpful in determining what subjects your readers are most interested in or what framing of a call-to-action worked best. But are you looking at *where* in the message your readers are clicking? It's easy to assume that links closer to the top of the email are going to be clicked the most, but

at what length does a message cease to be effective? A heat map can help you determine that.

And it's easy to create. **Email Heatmap** Image not found or type unknown A few years ago, we wanted to know if our one of our newsletters was too long and if people valued the content shared in the sidebar. To find out, we manually created a very simple heat map (see a snapshot at right – and [download the template](#) for it). We divided up the newsletter into sections, then we went through a few months of messages looking at the link that was clicked the most and the link clicked second-most. In PowerPoint, we inserted the number of rectangles we needed and, for each issue of the newsletter, we colored in the corresponding rectangle with increasingly darker shades of red. Starting with the lightest red, we made the rectangle one shade darker each time a link corresponded with that section. Using this simple technique, we saw that the most-clicked link was pretty predictable, it was the top section. But the second-most-clicked links gave us comfort that people were reading and clicking throughout the newsletter, including the sidebar. If your organization creates a similar heat map and sees the color tapering off about halfway through your materials, it may be a sign to shorten future messages.

## Website Heat Maps

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Many people utilize Google Analytics to track what pages people visit and how those visitors get to your site. But are you also utilizing the information on where on those pages people are clicking? While the feature has been removed from the Google Analytics website, Google still offers a “[Page Analytics](#)” plugin for the Chrome web browser. Google doesn't translate the clicks into a heat map for you, but the helpful pointers and percentages let you know what people are clicking on. See the snapshot above of the landing page for our [resources on ethics and accountability](#). From this type of heat map, we can tell that most people who come to the section on ethics and accountability choose to learn more about the [Principles and Practices/Standards for Excellence programs](#) that many of the state associations in our network offer. This provides a different dimension to any analysis you do on your website. It goes beyond just what pages are visited the most, by showing a bit more about the path visitors take. And, like the email heat maps, if you see that clicks taper off after a certain point on the page, you may want to trim the content or at

least be sure that any calls to action appear before that taper-off point.

There are also a few good tools out there that create heat maps for you. Among them are [Crazy Egg](#) and [Hotjar \(which offers a nonprofit discount\)](#).

## Resources

- [What is a Heat Map, How to Create One, Examples and Case Studies](#) (Crazy Egg)
- [How to use click maps to optimize your website](#) (Hotjar)
- [Heatmap - Optimization Glossary](#) (Optimizely)
- [Page Analytics extension](#) for Google Chrome browser