

D4.13 – Second Web Visitors Report

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Topten ACT aims to transform the European market of energy-using products towards higher energy efficiency. Topten ACT identifies the top energy-efficient products in 16 European countries, and makes this information available to consumers and large buyers on tailored national websites. The top models in different product categories (such as household appliances, lighting, office equipment, consumer electronics, cars) are presented with comprehensive product information based on official labels and standardized declarations. Topten works with manufacturers and thus increases both the market offer and consumer demand of the most efficient products. Topten is entirely impartial and independent from manufacturers and retailers and product selection criteria is always published online. Topten ACT is supported by the European Commission's research and innovation programme Horizon 2020, and many national organisations (energy agencies, environmental and consumer organisations and research institutes). The Topten ACT project involves 17 partners in 16 European countries. It is coordinated by ADEME (Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie). More information and access to all national websites on the European site: www.topten.eu

WP4 Dissemination and Exploitation, Task 4.3 – Monitoring of Websites and Media Impact D4.13 – 2nd report summarising key website visitors statistics (months 19-42).

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Background

Each Topten national partner operates a website to point consumers towards the most energy efficient products on the market. As a whole, the project aims to reach 2 million web visitors per year by the end of the project. The desired, cumulative web visitors total is split relative to the size of the partner country.

As an expected share, indicative targets for the web visitor figures are as follows:

- 180,000 visitors per year in Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy and the UK
- 100,000 visitors per year in Belgium, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Sweden
- 65,000 visitors per year in Czech Republic, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Norway
- 60,000 visitors per year to the Topten.eu website

Analytics tools, metrics and definitions

Analytics tools

As in the first project period, all partners used Google Analytics to measure web statistics except Germany (who continued to use Piwik) and Austria (who continued to report from their own web CMS). Comparison of these tracking tools is discussed in the D4.12, Report on Website Visitors; it is not thought that there are significant differences between their approach in quantifying web visitors and usage statistics.

Metrics

As a measure of web visitors, both unique users and sessions are considered in this report. As was discussed in the first Web Visitors Report, Topten ACT considers that sessions is the more appropriate metric and means to quantify visitors rather than users, and recommends it is used for reporting.

A visitor returning to a site is a significant part of the user journey; the user might need to come back to find more information and then make a purchase decision on a subsequent visit, or access a different product group. If only counting users, no greater significance is given to the value provided by Topten to a regular user of the site, compared to a user who only accesses Topten on one occasion. However, information on the number of unique users is also valuable and figures are quantified in this report.

As with the interim report, figures for users for Austria have been estimated, as these cannot be captured by their analytics programme, as detailed in the appendix.

Definitions

The definitions of sessions, users, page views, bounce rate and loyalty are the same as those used in the first project period; these are detailed in D4.12, Report on Website Visitors.

Website visitor statistics

Indicative targets for Topten websites were the aim to receive 2m visitors per year by the end of the project.

Statistics are summarised below for visitors to all Topten sites. These cover each 12-month period of the project, and the 6-month extension period at the end.

Metric	Year 1 (Mar 15 – Feb 16)	Year 2 (Mar 16 – Feb 17)	Year 3 (Mar 17 – Feb 18)	Extension period (Mar 18 – Aug 18)	Total
Users	1,748,143	1,479,342	1,429,442	720,387	5,377,314
Sessions	2,072,186	1,769,957	1,721,998	866,254	6,430,395

Overall, there were 6.4m web sessions on Topten sites during the project. 5.4m unique users accessed Topten. Dividing the total users and sessions by the 3.5 years of the project, Topten was visited by 1.5m unique users, conducting 1.8m sessions on average per year.

By the periods covered by the interim report and final report, user and session data was as follows:

Metric	Period 1 – Interim Report (March 2015 – September 2016)	Period 2 – Final Report (October 2016 – August 2018)
Users	2,592,652	2,784,662
Sessions	3,079,968	3,350,427

Move to new website software

Several Topten partners moved to a new website frontend, product information interface (Akaneo) and content management system (Yii) in the second half of the project. This was intended to improve functionality and modernise website design, two aspects which also generally improve search engine ranking. New websites were also fully mobile enabled and included an e-commerce aspect enabling links to partner retailers to purchase Topten-listed appliances.

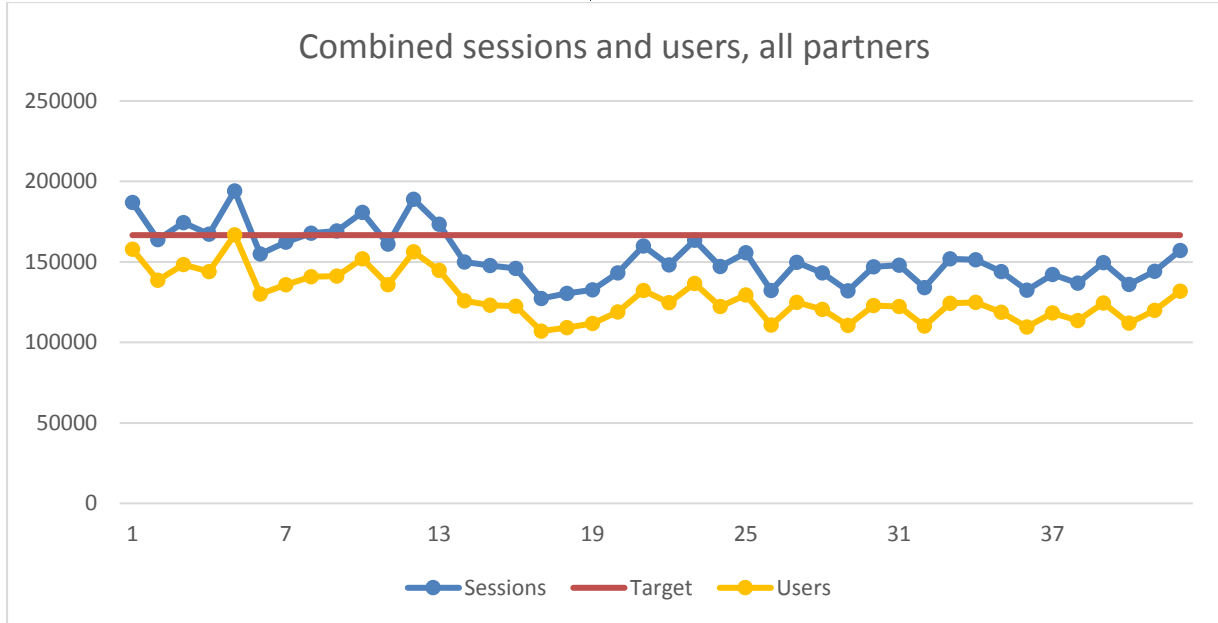
Partners moving to the new software in 2017 and 2018 were: Switzerland, UK, Italy, France, Czech Republic, Portugal, Poland and Belgium.

Tracking of web visitors over time

As an indicative target, Topten websites aimed to reach 2 million visitors per year by the end of the project. By year period, the most sessions were seen in the first 12 months, achieving the end of project target rate with 2.07 million. Visitor numbers were then seen to drop in years 2 and 3. Following a dip at around month 12, sessions increased again at around month 17, and remained at a fairly constant level following this. The average figure for visitors per year over the full 3.5 years of the project was 1.8 million. No significant seasonal trend on web visitors was seen across the consortium as a whole.

Reasons for this decline are thought to be mainly related to changes in the Google ranking algorithm in 2015 which prioritised mobile sites, and when some partners switched to new websites, there was not sufficient time in the project to fully benefit from new platforms with their increased functionality. Web sessions were seen to be increasing again in the final 3 months of the project. These aspects are explored in more detail in the conclusions section.

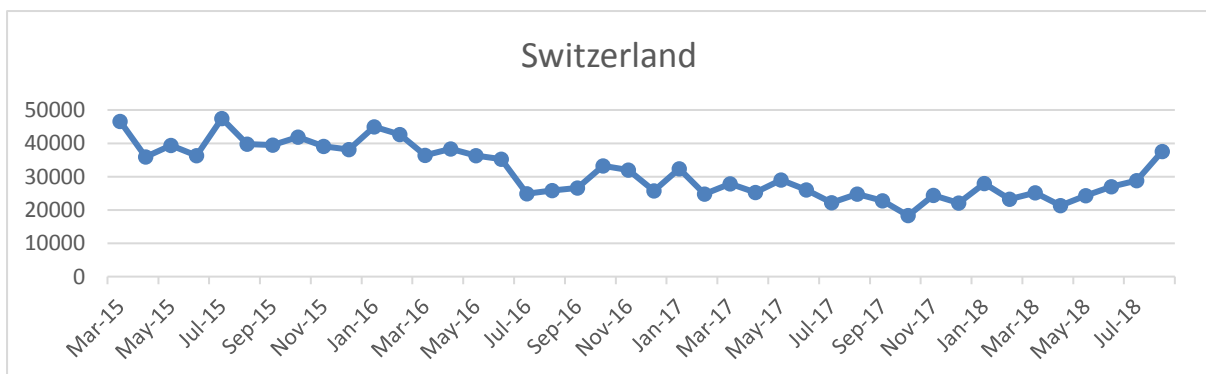
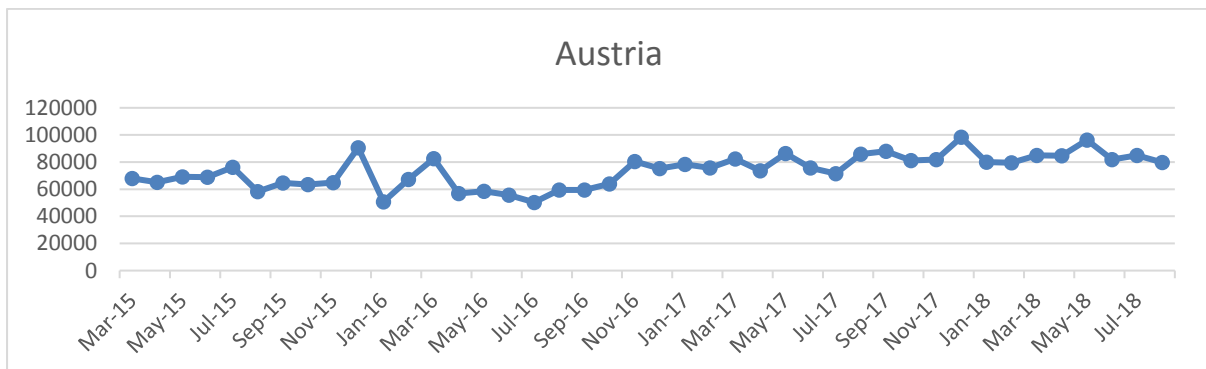
Total monthly sessions combined from all Topten websites over time are profiled below. The red line represents the number of sessions needed on average to achieve 70,000 visitors per month during the entire project, which equates to 2 million per year.



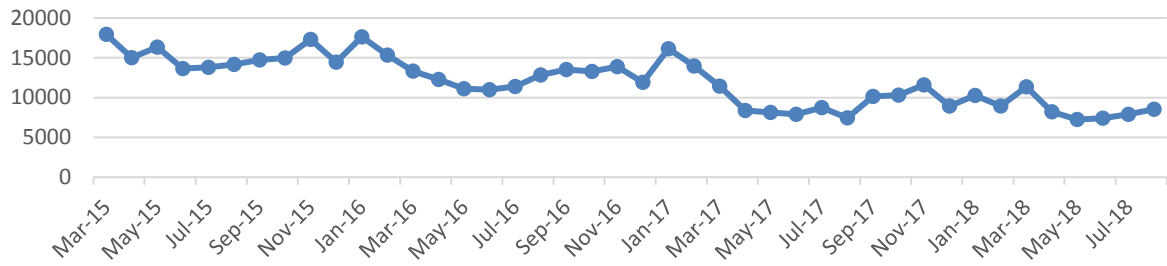
Partner web session profiles

Patterns of web sessions over time vary for the different partners. Whilst some maintained a fairly constant level of visitors, some partners saw spikes in visitors at different times. This was often due to a particular piece of coverage that gave the project strong exposure and increased website visitors.

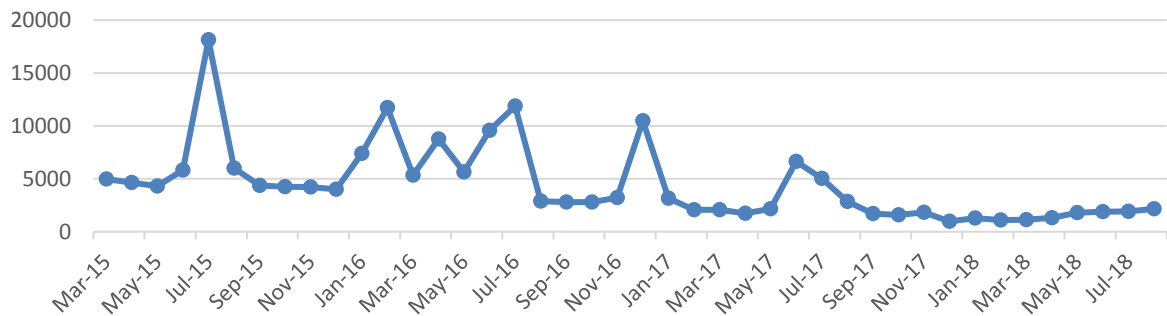
Countries with 180,000 annual indicative target



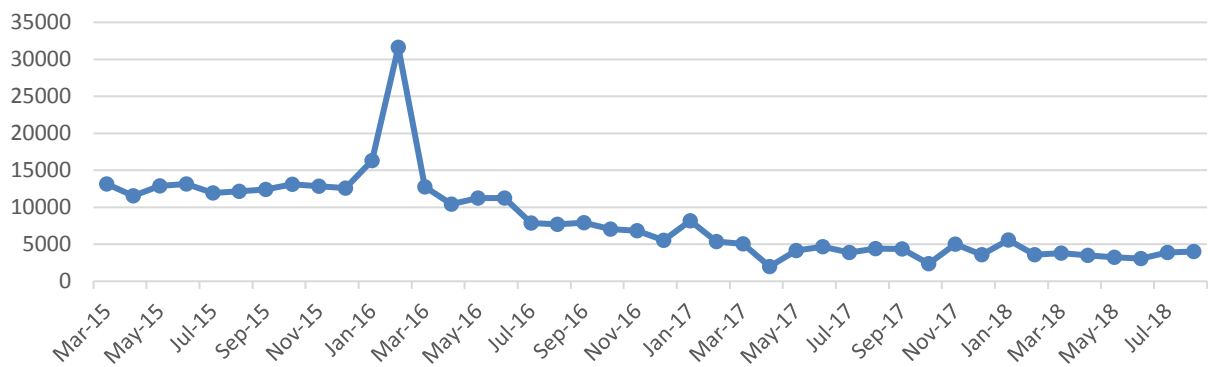
Germany



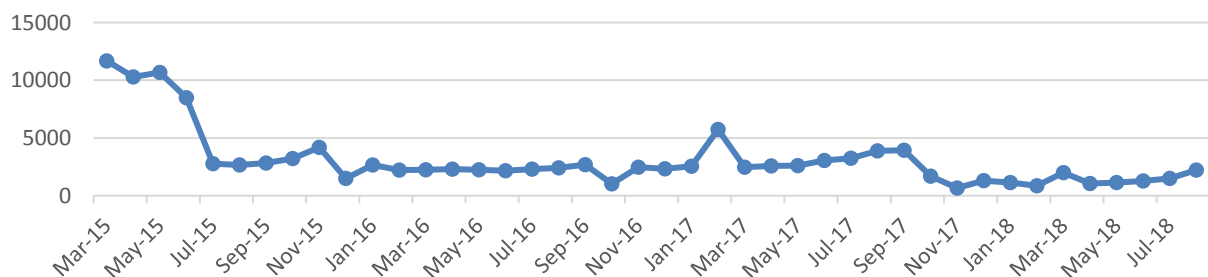
Italy



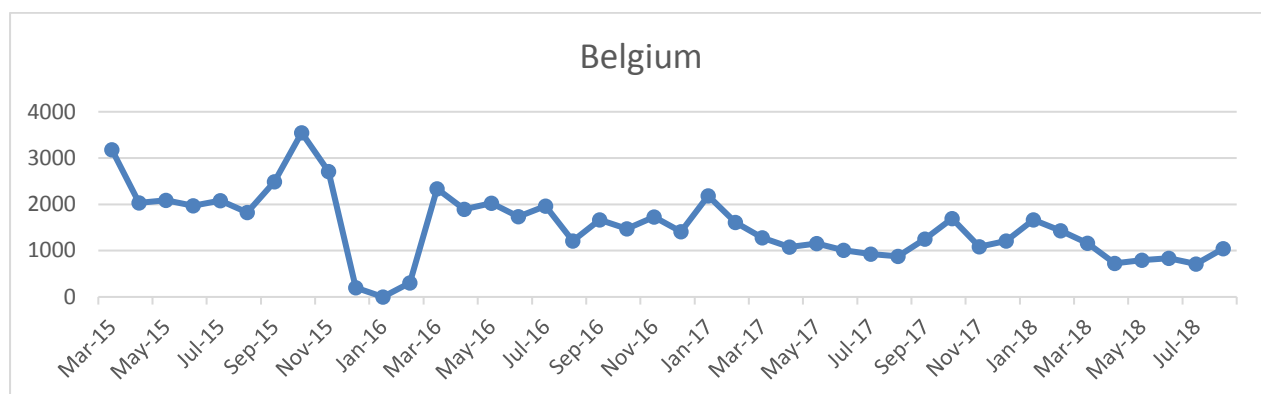
France



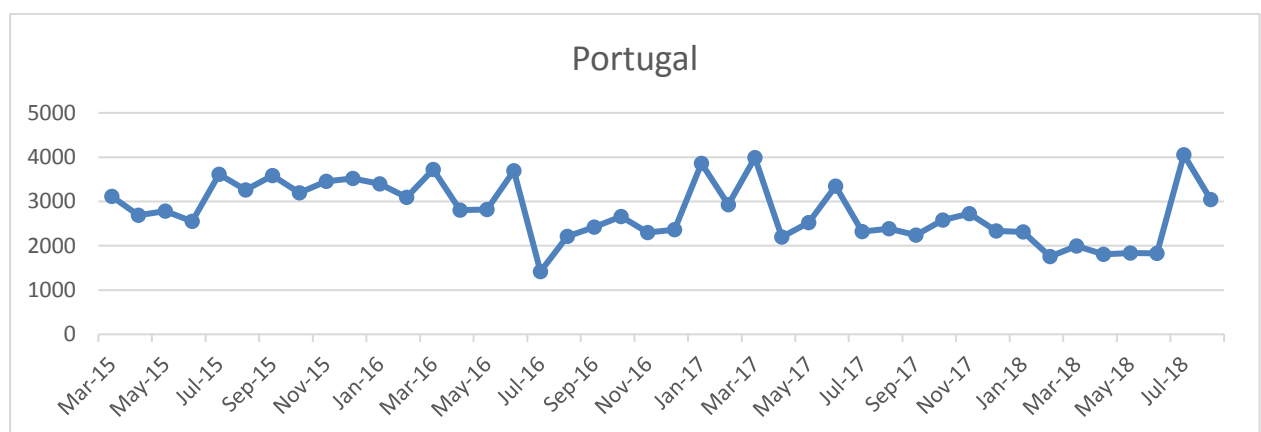
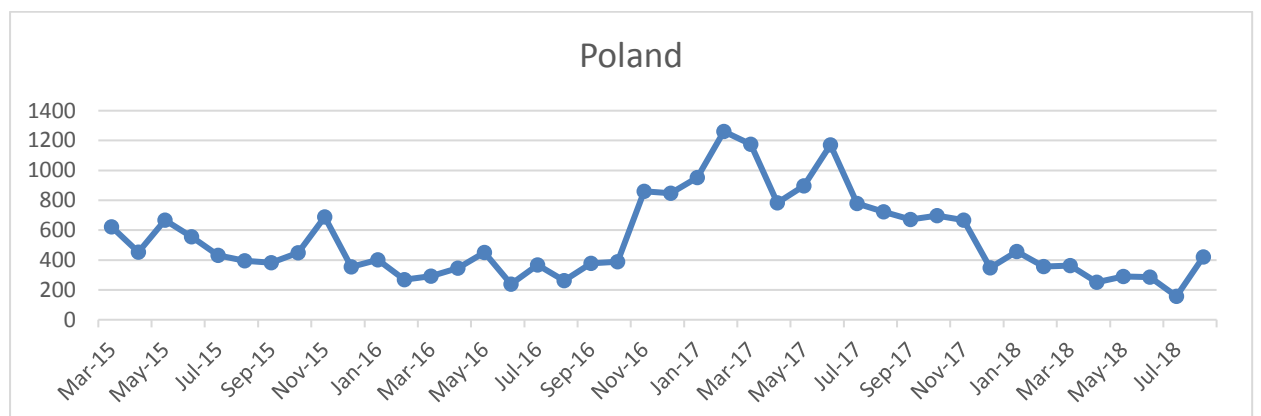
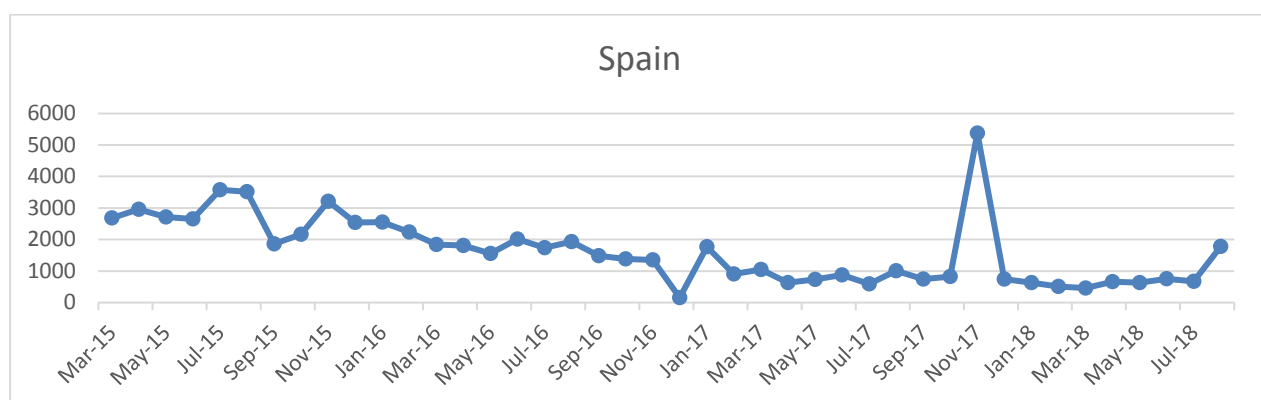
UK

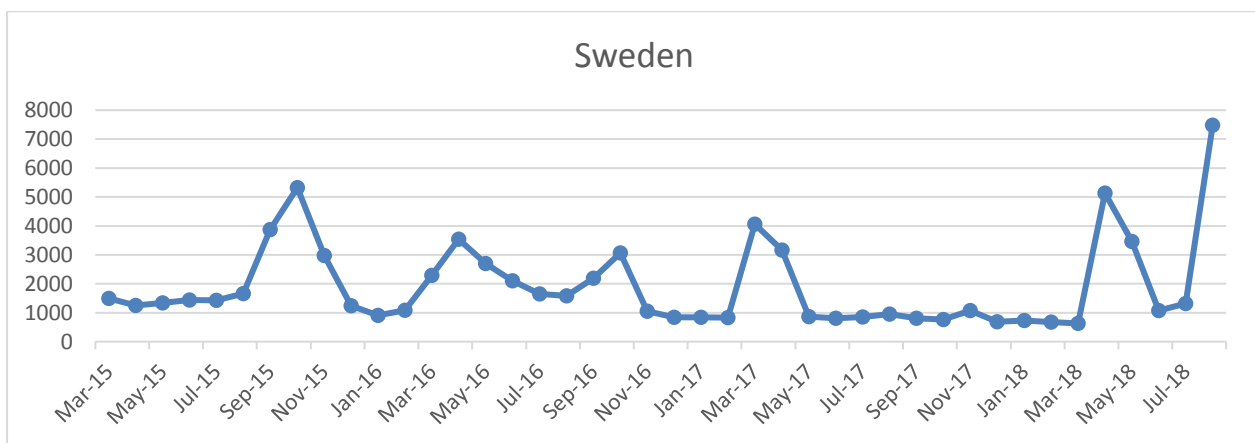
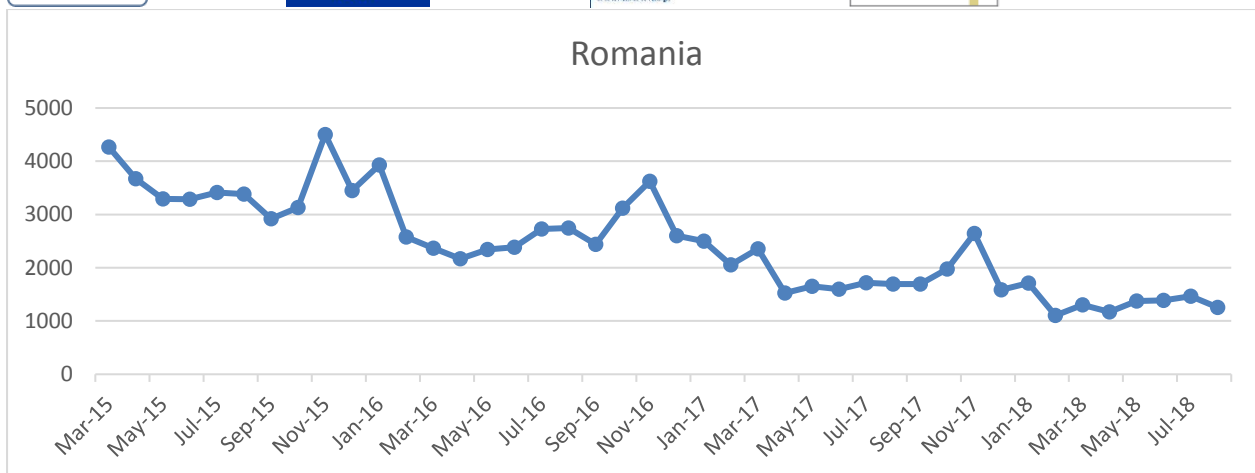


Countries with 100,000 annual indicative target

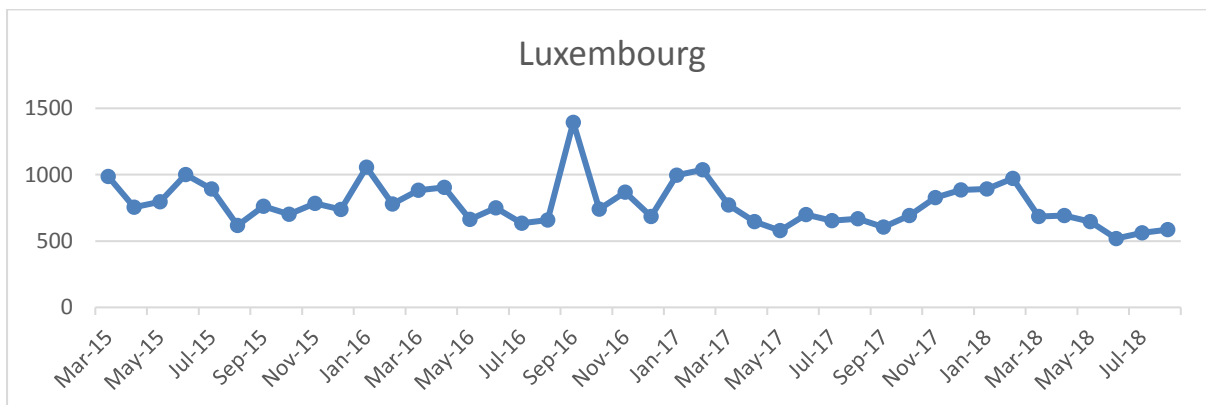
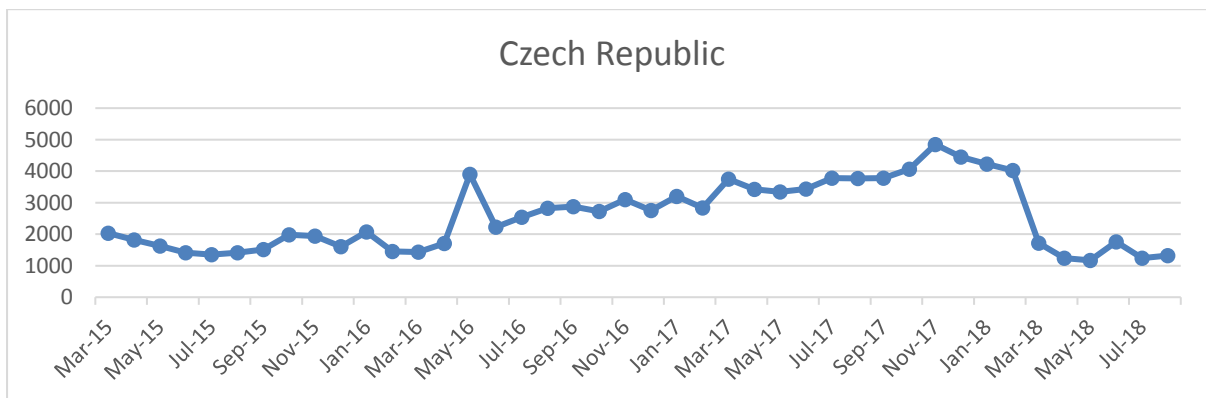


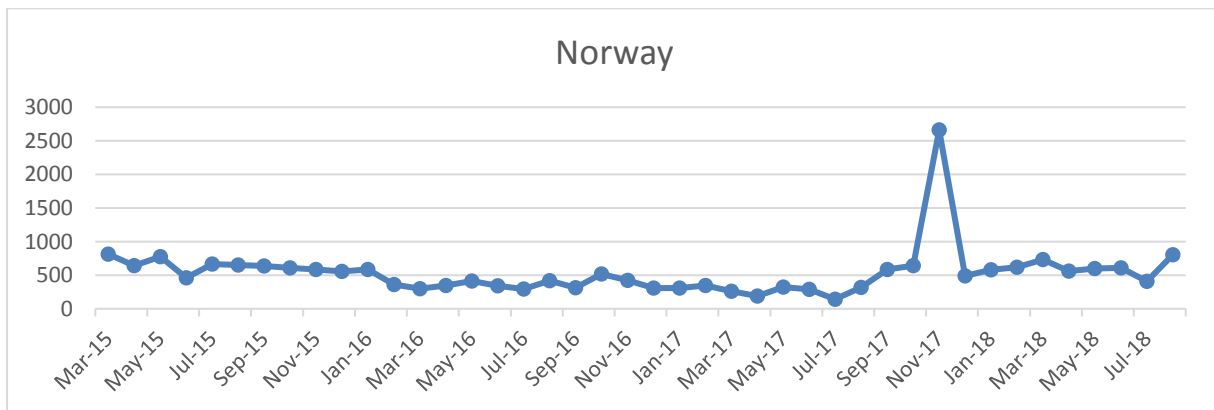
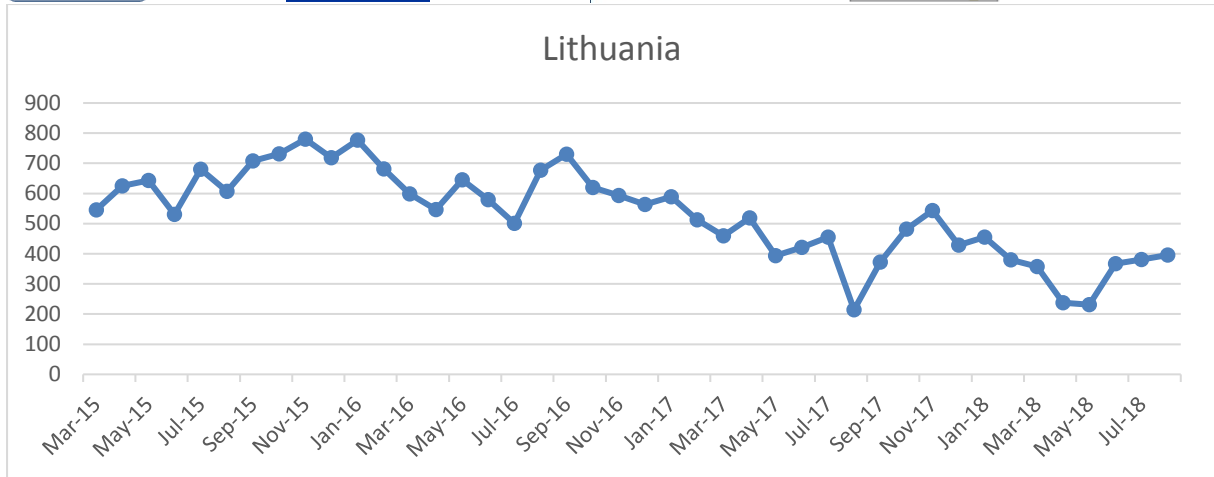
Note: Tipten Belgium confirmed that data was lost for January 2016. Figures for this month are expected to have been typical of the period.



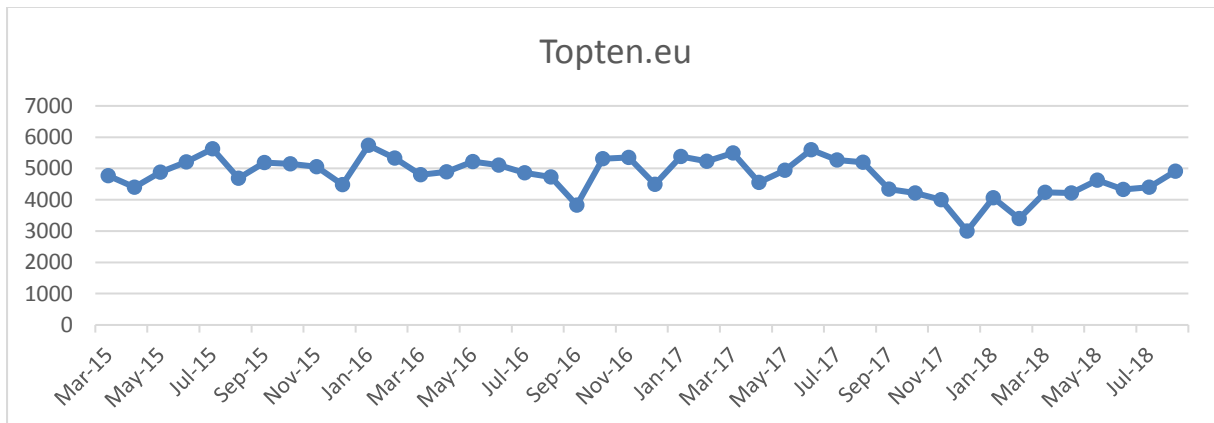


Countries with 65,000 annual indicative target





Topten.eu (60,000 annual indicative target)



Other measurement metrics

User Retention

Visitor statistics have been collated for the entire duration of the project, enabling assessment of the user journey, as well as comparison of each project period.

The average user journey seen was as follows:

Months 1-18	User spends 2 minutes and 17 seconds online and views 2.77 pages. 23% of visitors return to the site. 60% of visitors view one page and leave.
Months 19-42	User spends 3 minutes online and views 2.85 pages. 18% of visitors return to the site. 58% of visitors view one page and leave.
Overall project	User spends 2 minutes and 41 seconds online and views 2.81 pages. 20% of visitors return to the site. 59% of visitors view one page and leave.

As referenced in the first Web Visitors Report, Spinutech.com¹ reported some unofficial industry standard figures for good performance across various web visitors metrics in a 2015 blog. The article stressed that Google Analytics metrics do not necessarily provide a definitive assessment of the success of a website. However, as indicative figures, an average session duration of 2-3 minutes, and a minimum number of 2 pages per session viewed was considered good. Overall Topten sites were in this bracket, with some partners outperforming this. Below 50% was considered as an industry standard for bounce rate – on average figures across all partners exceeded this, but again this metric should be used more as a guide, when considering the different functions of websites. In addition, with several websites upgraded towards the end of the period, there was not sufficient opportunity to gain strong insights from analytics data on the performance of new platform. Some initial trends were seen suggesting a positive effect from the new website, for example in France, where Guide Topten's most popular pages following the upgrade switched from text-based recommendation pages to the newly designed and more functional product listings, suggesting that the upgrade may have improved certain analytics metrics.

On average, the amount of time spent on a Topten site, and the number of pages viewed was seen to increase in the second project period. Bounce rate stayed about the same, and loyalty (percentage of returning visitors) was seen to decrease, meaning a greater proportion of new visitors accessed Topten sites in the second project period.

Varying user journeys were seen amongst partners' analytics data, although the majority of partners did not observe significant differences in visitor statistics between the two periods. Luxembourg and Sweden had the highest average time on site across the project, and also showed the largest increase in time spent from the first to the second period. Norway and Spain both saw a marked increase in time on site in period 2 with Spain's average pages viewed also increasing significantly.

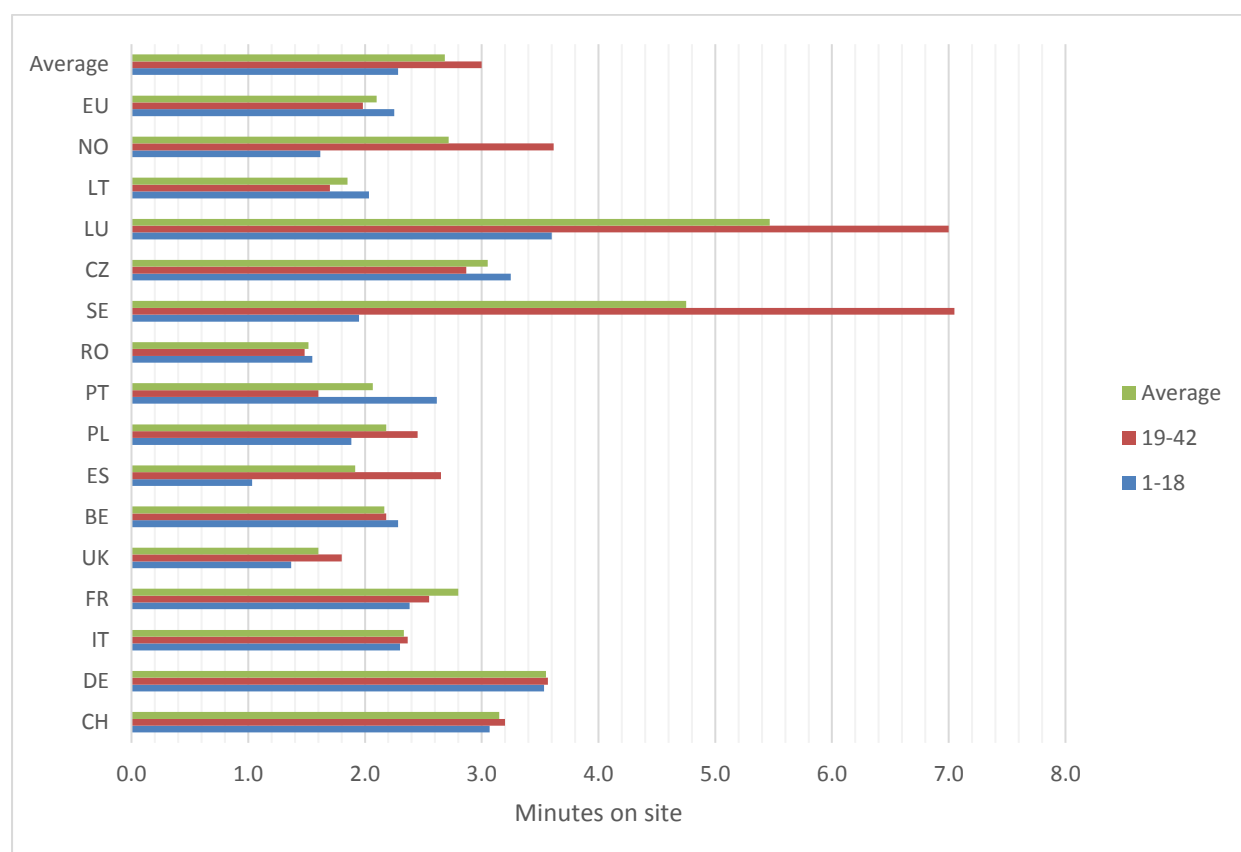
Regarding bounce rate, improvements were seen in period 2 again from Spain, who had an average bounce rate of over 80% in period 1, and reduced this to under 60% in period 2. France, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic were also seen to decrease their bounce rate significantly in period 2.

Loyalty is a difficult metric to analyse – whilst retaining a base of engaged users is beneficial, and may increase the likelihood of purchases through Topten sites, a decreased returning visitor percentage is not necessarily cause for concern, and may actually be a benefit in that the site is attracting new users.

Data for these metrics for each partner, as well as overall averages across the consortium is presented below.

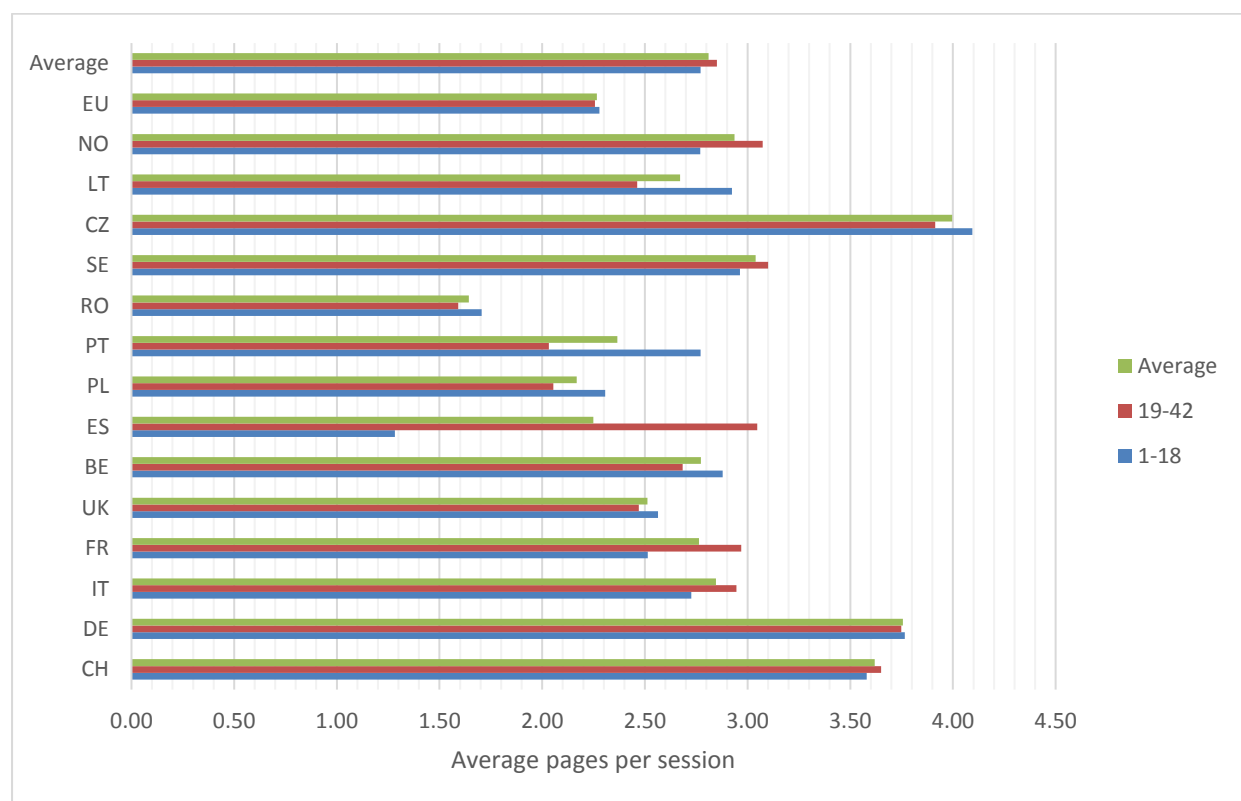
¹ <https://www.spinutech.com/blog/digital-marketing/7-website-analytics-that-matter-most/>

Time on site



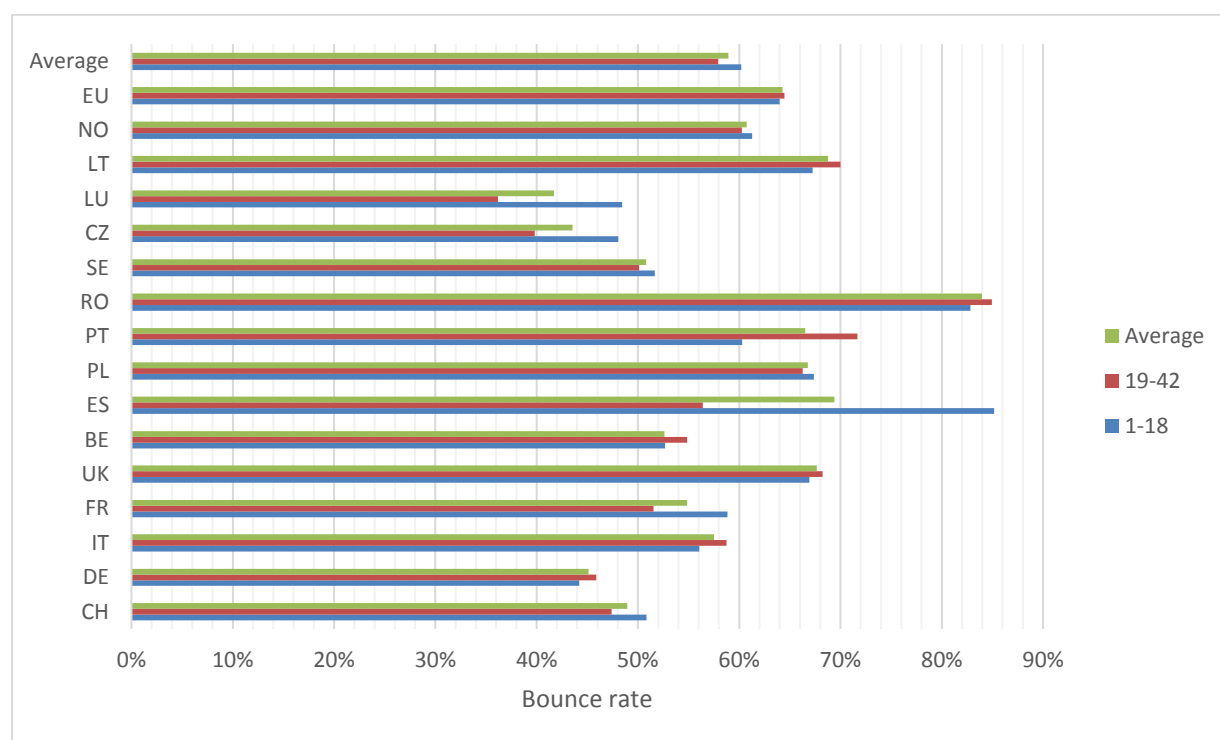
Data unavailable for Austria

Pages viewed per session



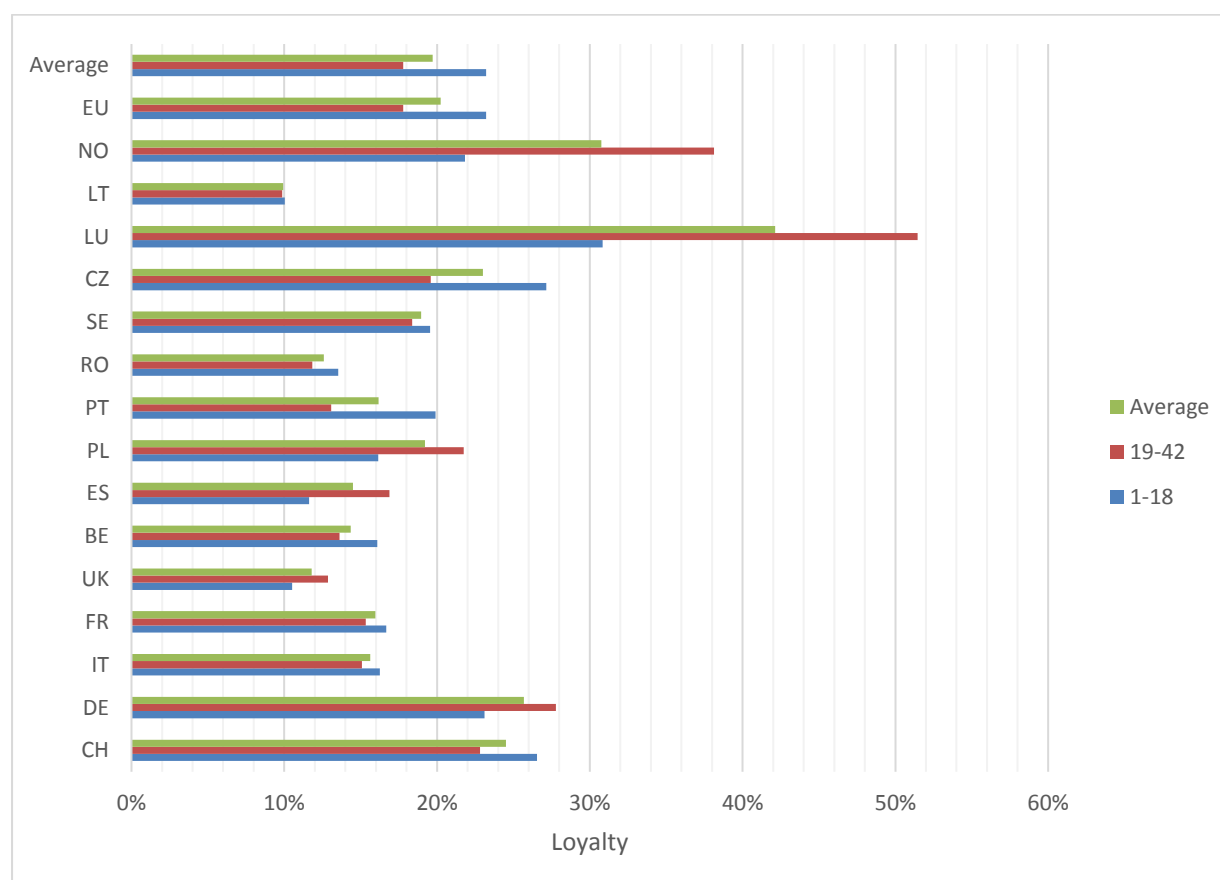
Data unavailable for Austria and Luxembourg

Bounce rate



Data unavailable for Austria

Loyalty



Data unavailable for Austria

Most popular categories

Partners reported the 5 most popular pages on their websites, giving insights into the categories of greatest interest to consumers in that country, and what other information consumers looked for on sites. Overall findings were as follows:

Partner*	Most popular category	Most popular pages	Other popular categories
CH	Vacuum cleaners	Home page, awards	Washing machines, air conditioning
DE	Large domestic appliances	Large domestic appliances	Televisions, heating, small domestic appliances, Green energy
IT	Air conditioning	Home page	Televisions
FR	Large domestic appliances, vacuum cleaners	Home page, recommendations pages	Refrigeration
UK	Washing machines	Home page, Refrigerator product guide	Refrigeration, lighting, tumble dryers
BE	Cars	Home page	Large domestic appliances
ES	Refrigeration	Home page, advice page	
PL	Heating	Home page, recommendations, Competitions	Televisions
PT	Plug-in hybrid cars	Home page	Large domestic appliances
RO	Refrigeration	Recommendations	Large domestic appliances, vacuum cleaners
SE	Boat engines	Energy Tips	Lighting, Refrigeration, Tyres
CZ	Washing machines		Refrigeration
LU	Electric bikes (Pedelec)	Subsidy schemes	Cars, lighting
LT	Washing machines	Home page, recommendations	Refrigerators, vacuum cleaners
NO	Tumble dryers	Home page, energy calculator	Heating, Dishwashers

*Data unavailable for Austria and Topten.eu

Analysis

Combining figures from all partners, Topten websites saw a decline in both sessions and users across the second project period compared to the first.

Broken down by country, this was as follows:

Partner	Average sessions per month, period 1	Average sessions per month, period 2	Percentage change
CH	64,756	81,310	26%
DE	37,645	26,356	-30%
IT	14,257	10,091	-29%
FR	12,782	4,485	-65%
UK	6,673	2,653	-60%
BE	4,188	2,205	-47%
ES	1,856	1,232	-34%
PL	2,371	1,053	-56%
PT	421	644	53%
RO	3,018	2,581	-14%
SE	3,105	1,875	-40%
CZ	2,110	1,791	-15%
LU	1,986	3,041	53%
LT	829	735	-11%
NO	648	434	-33%
CH	514	553	8%
Topten EU	4,945	4,633	-6%
All partners	162,104	145,671	-10%

One reason for this broad decline is likely due to the change in Google's ranking algorithm known as 'Mobilegeddon'², which occurred in April 2015. This had the effect of giving ranking priority to mobile optimised websites. Until several Topten sites updated to the new software in 2017 and 2018, the majority were not fully mobile enabled.

Additionally, following the move to the new website, several partners saw a dip in visitors in the subsequent months. The reason identified for this was that new websites took a short amount of time to fix broken links and redirects from previous sites, and new pages required Google indexing. This can be seen in the drop in visitors on the visitor profiles for the UK (November 2017), Italy (December 2017) and the Czech Republic (March 2018).

Different partners observed different patterns in their web hits. The degree of variance around the mean number of visitors can be estimated by calculating the relative standard deviation (RSD) for each partner (standard deviation as a percentage of the mean). A lower RSD suggests a more consistent level of web visitors.

This was calculated as follows:

Partner	Relative standard deviation, RSD
CH	16%
DE	25%
IT	26%
FR	66%
UK	81%
BE	83%
ES	49%
PL	66%
PT	51%
RO	24%
SE	37%
CZ	78%
LU	42%
LT	22%
NO	28%
CH	70%
Topten EU	13%

Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Topten.eu saw a broadly consistent pattern of visitors, without any significant spikes or drops in coverage. The UK (February 2017) and Spain (November 2017) saw spikes in coverage due to competitions in the second project period. Portugal, despite having one of the lower RSD values, did see a number of sharp increases in visitors, largely due to their coverage of Topten on *Minuto Verde*. Italy, Sweden and Norway were also among the partners who saw a relatively varied profile of visitor numbers.

Spain reported significant activity in the second half of the project to improve their SEO ranking and reduce robot visitors to their website. This activity is explained in more detail in the dissemination report for months 19-42 (D4.9), and clearly improved the website's bounce rate, time on site and pages viewed per session.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobilegeddon>

In the second half of the project, overall time on sites and number of pages viewed increased. Large increases in this metric were seen in Luxembourg and Sweden. This may have been a function of the types of products that were popular on these national websites requiring users to take more time to make comparisons. Boat motors were a popular product category in Sweden, and electric bikes (pedelecs) and cars were among the most viewed product types in Luxembourg. For the majority of partners, large domestic appliances were the most popular category.

Conclusions

Topten remains a valued resource for consumers seeking information about the most efficient products available, general advice and tips on energy saving, and as a resource for policy makers, showing the state of the market and best available technology on efficiency.

During the entire project, 5.4 million unique users accessed Topten websites and 6.4 million web sessions were conducted. The average number of sessions per year was 1.8 million, with 1.5 million users of sites on average per year.

A decline was seen in web visitors during the project period; web sessions across all partners dropped by 10% in the second period compared to the first. However, towards the end of the project, an overall trajectory of increasing visitors was seen between months 40 and 42, in large part due to publicity surrounding launches of new websites, and the phase-out of non-directional halogen bulbs. On the latter, Topten played a key support and communication role in this policy development and was widely quoted in the media, whilst providing valuable resource in the transition towards LED lighting, identifying efficient lighting products, and quantifying purchase and running costs. This development was an example of the worth of the Topten network during a key and widely-covered development in EU energy policy.

Reasons for the reduction in visitors related to aspects of search engines are detailed above, but there may be additional reasons as to why a decline was seen. For example, online retailers provide more information on the energy performance of products compared to previous years. As well as providing the mandatory energy label class and product fiche (which has been required since January 2014, but in some countries, widespread implementation was not immediate), filtering by energy label class and providing figures on running costs becomes an increasingly common aspect of online retailer's platforms. Other platforms were also observed that performed a similar function to Topten – for example Enervee³ provided a platform for utilities that ranked appliances by their efficiency (based on the energy label, but using a numerical scoring system) and provided links for purchase.

Another barrier to increasing consumer interactions with Topten websites may have been the current state of EU Energy Labelling. The upcoming policy change in the label scale has been implemented as a result of the current system being considered confusing for consumers, as well as having reduced ability to 'pull' the market due to saturation of the highest energy classes. Whilst it could be argued that at this time, an initiative like Topten would be most needed (for example to quantify the difference between an A+ and A+++ appliance), it may have been the case that with A+ being the lowest category available to buy in a number of product categories that consumers may have not seen the need for

³ <https://enervee.com/>



comparison, assuming that if they were buying an A+ model that they were getting one of the top performers.

Whilst the number of visitors was seen to drop overall in the second project period, it was encouraging the average time on site and number of pages viewed increased, suggesting an overall better quality of interaction between users and the websites.

With the upcoming revision of the energy label, there is considerable scope for confusion from consumers and retailers when it comes to selecting or selling the most energy efficient appliances, electronics and lighting. Topten remains a trusted, established resource that has proven its ability to identify not only the most efficient products available, but also the direction of the market on efficiency. With labelling classes due to change over the next few years for a number of products, Topten occupies a unique space as a wide-reaching resource able to ease the process of selecting the most efficient models, as well as provide information on the estimated running costs, advice for most efficient use of household products and insights for policy development.

Appendix

Figures on total web sessions, all partners:

Partner	Months						
	1-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30	31-36	37-42
AT	405,837	401,633	363,360	433,121	475,239	508,892	512,406
CH	245,461	246,194	197,007	174,778	155,186	138,723	164,090
DE	90,922	94,431	71,994	82,739	52,036	60,232	50,623
IT	43,955	35,993	44,039	24,583	20,535	8,489	10,198
FR	74,800	98,911	61,249	40,802	24,189	24,494	21,579
UK	46,592	16,597	13,692	16,793	17,825	9,589	9,202
BE	13,183	9,254	11,165	10,062	6,319	8,332	5,279
ES	18,109	14,565	10,893	7,062	4,891	8,815	4,948
PL	3,122	2,543	1,958	4,688	5,526	3,197	1,768
PT	18,008	20,244	16,672	16,529	16,758	13,944	14,559
RO	21,316	20,507	14,734	16,344	10,544	10,718	7,954
SE	8,616	15,408	13,878	8,811	10,716	4,745	19,100
CZ	9,667	10,558	14,635	17,486	21,494	25,389	8,452
LU	5,046	4,818	4,490	5,720	4,017	4,870	3,691
LT	3,631	4,396	3,547	3,609	2,462	2,661	1,970
NO	4,006	3,333	2,105	2,218	1,525	5,571	3,718
Topten EU	29,586	30,944	29,598	29,596	31,064	23,011	26,717
Total	1,041,857	1,030,329	875,016	894,941	860,326	861,672	866,254
Grand Total	6,430,395						

Figures for total users, all partners:

Partner	Months						
	1-6	7-12	13-18	19-24	25-30	31-36	37-42
AT*	338,198	334,694	302,800	360,934	396,033	424,077	427,005
CH	202,594	202,218	162,189	142,599	127,699	108,777	132,042
DE	77,183	80,541	60,604	69,507	43,018	49,023	41,210
IT	70,365	83,570	51,782	35,124	21,143	20,434	18,491
FR	38,578	31,523	38,598	21,561	18,237	6,974	8,772
UK	43,665	14,962	12,422	14,773	16,098	7,756	7,704
BE	11,699	8,248	9,686	8,793	5,494	7,841	4,711
ES	16,366	13,067	10,020	5,964	4,177	6,960	4,340
PL	2,818	2,225	1,627	3,418	4,188	2,494	1,361
PT	15,374	16,718	14,029	14,376	15,001	12,719	14,120
RO	19,208	18,235	12,923	14,363	9,137	9,263	6,971
SE	7,255	13,193	12,013	7,523	9,403	3,977	16,806
CZ	7,669	8,212	11,441	13,843	17,417	21,368	7,161
LU	3,979	3,138	3,450	4,132	3,267	3,600	2,772
LT	3,330	3,900	3,254	3,311	2,163	2,351	1,809
NO	3,564	2,860	1,768	1,537	934	4,310	3,240
Topten EU	24,062	24,932	24,174	24,804	25,741	18,369	21,872
Total	885,907	862,236	732,780	746,562	719,150	710,293	720,387
Grand Total	5,377,314						

*Users for Austria are estimated, as their analytics tool does not capture this metric. Users are estimated from the average user to session ratio of 1.2 calculated across the entire project period.