



## The power of googling

The launch of the online version of South African Family Practice (SAFP) took place just more than 12 months ago, during December 2005. The most important aim of the project was for the journal content to reach an international audience of researchers, since SAFP was (and still is not) indexed in PubMed®. The second aim was to increase and diversify the number of original articles submitted to the SAFP, in order to improve the international, particularly African, standing and relevance of the journal, and improve the quality of published original articles.

During 2006, when compared to 2005, there was indeed a 41% increase in manuscript submissions. It was particularly pleasing to note that almost 20% of the 2006 submissions were from other African countries. Is this the beginning of a truly **"African Family Practice"** journal?

One of the advantages of online publishing is the fairly accurate measurement of usage/reading of the online journal. It can be measured through a number of parameters. **"Page impressions"** is the number of pages viewed by all readers collectively, a good measure of the intensity of reading. **"Visits"** is the number of visits, as identified by the visitor's IP address (each computer uses a IP unique address on the internet) counted each time a new session is initiated, which means each time the same person access the website during a new session it will be counted again. **"Sites"** is the number of unique visits during a defined period, with each IP address counted only once, a good measure to determine the actual number of online readers.

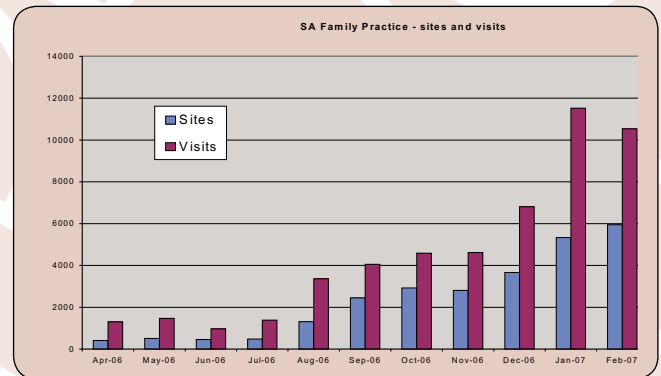
During the month of July 2006 the SAFP website was officially registered with Google®, the world's most popular search engine and its subsidiary Google Scholar® (<http://scholar.google.com>) (GS). GS is a search engine primarily aimed at scholars, and dedicated to scholarly content published on the internet. It covers peer reviewed-papers, theses, books, abstracts and other research papers. It even links up with libraries through a special library link program to enable librarians to make their offering visible through GS.

How accurate is Google® and GS? Robert Steinbrook reported in January 2006 that Google and GS combined already referred the vast majority (60.1%) of requests to Highwire Press hosted journals, one of the world's leading online publishers.<sup>1</sup> PubMed® came second with 8.7%. Giustini reported that within a year of its launch in November 2004 GS already referred more visitors to biomedical journals than has PubMed.<sup>2</sup> He also illustrated that in November 2005 Google and GS combined were responsible for more than 80% of visits to the BMJ

website. It is important to note that GS also covers PubMed. GS has its shortcomings, which are noted elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, and is not yet a replacement for doing PubMed searches for any serious researcher, but despite that, is a major advance in making medical research available to a global readership. The SAFP's online growth is a case in point.

In the month following its registration with GS, August 2006, SAFP experienced an unusual increase in traffic, more than six times the usual page impressions, which dropped the next month to still more than 3 times the average before August. Since then SAFP experienced a remarkable growth pattern both in visits and sites (Figure 1). The August 2006 growth in all probability can be ascribed to the search engine crawlers of GS analysing and indexing the SAFP content.

**Figure 1: Visits and sites on the SA Family Practice website ([www.safpj.co.za](http://www.safpj.co.za))**



SAFP presently has a monthly print circulation of 5500. This number was exceeded by the online version during February 2007, which means that more people are now reading the SAFP online than in print, if one assumes that everyone receiving the print version will read at least some of it. This is the power of googling!. SAFP will continue to pursue indexing in PubMed but it is good to know in the meantime that our research is available to whoever needs it.

### References

- <sup>1</sup>Searching for the Right Search Reaching the Medical Literature. Steinbrook, R. N Eng J Med 2006;354:4-7
- <sup>2</sup>How Google is changing medicine. Giustini, D. BMJ 2005;331:1487-1488
- <sup>3</sup>Google Scholar. Vine, R. J Med Libr Assoc. 2006; 94(1): 9799.

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# South African Academy of Family Practice/Primary Care



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