QUICK GUIDE TO GA4

Why Busy People Should Learn More about GA4

Brighter Side Marketing

The biggest change to happen analytics in the last 15 years is happening now with Google Analytics 4.

Google Analytics 4 (GA4) is the new version of Google Analytics. It provides smarter insights into your website's performance to help make better data-driven decisions across your marketing initiatives.
In this quick guide, we'll introduce the core concepts of GA4 including:

● Why the change?
● Why is it called Google Analytics 4?
● How is Google Analytics 4 different from Universal Analytics?
● What new features are included in GA4?
● Upgrading to Google Analytics 4

WHY THE CHANGE TO GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4?
Google Analytics is rapidly evolving for several reasons:

● End-user privacy is top of mind. From regulatory changes and browser updates to users wanting more control over their data, there've been a lot of updates to online privacy in recent years. This has pushed Google to transition to a platform that will accommodate these changes, while still providing marketers with accurate and rich data.

● There is too much data. Whether you have a local business or enterprise-level website, marketers are overwhelmed by data. In this world of big data, Google Analytics is rethinking how best to display the data it generates to make it more insightful and powerful.

WHY IS IT CALLED GA4?

Google Analytics is 15 years old! Google Analytics 4 is the 4th version, hence the name. We started with Urchin, then went to Classic Google Analytics, followed by Universal Analytics, Google Analytic 4 GA4 was established in 2020.

HOW IS GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4 DIFFERENT FROM UNIVERSAL ANALYTICS?

There are backend and frontend changes to Google Analytics, making the transition from Universal Analytics to Google Analytics 4 the most dramatic leap forward in the product's history.

At a top-level, Google Analytics 4 is:
·Built with machine learning, which makes the data more insightful.
·Designed to provide you with a complete understanding of a full customer life cycle.
·Built to be durable and scalable. It'll work with or without cookies.

HERE ARE THE THREE BIGGEST CHANGES TO THE OLD PLATFORM:

- **The Model — From Pageviews to Events**
- **Tracking Code — From Universal Analytics to Global Site Tag**
- **User Interface — Completely Reimagined**

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG CHANGES

1.The Model — From Pageviews to Events

In the first three versions, Google Analytics relied on the concept of hits, or pageviews. Users and sessions were the focus of this model. If we wanted to leverage events (like tracking interaction with a PDF or video player), we had to write custom code.

The new version of Google Analytics moves to an event-driven landscape, giving marketers data beyond pageviews. The new data includes scroll tracking, video engagement, site search, file downloads, and more. This codeless event tracking is all available in GA4 without having to create any custom events.

2.Tracking Code — From Universal Analytics to Global Site Tag

Google Analytics is implemented using a tracking code that you place on each page of your website. The tracking code for Google Analytics 4 is radically different from the tracking codes utilized in the first three iterations of Google Analytics.

The three first iterations of GA were mostly user interface updates; the tracking code remained the same, continuing to track pageviews. In fact, if you were to place the Urchin tracking code from 2005 on your website today, you'd still pull data into the Universal Analytics platform!

Google Analytics 4 is installed on your website using a Global Site Tag. This new tracking code supports the event-based model. We'll dive more into the tracking code later in this guide.

3.User Interface — Completely Reimagined

If you've recently taken a look at Google Analytics, then you'll notice that the user interface looks quite different; it's been entirely reimagined.

With Universal Analytics, it was best to think in terms of the ABC's — Acquisition, Audience, Behavior, and Conversions. With Google Analytics 4, this shifts to Acquisition, Engagement, Monetization, and Retention.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG CHANGES

NEW FEATURES IN GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4

Change is hard. And knowing this is a big one can make it feel overwhelming. Let's look at the new features included in Google Analytics 4 to get you excited!

NEW IDENTITY METHODS

Audiences today are fragmented. The customer acquisition life cycle includes multiple touchpoints — often from multiple devices. This makes it hard to track one user across their journey from prospect to customer.

With Universal Analytics, we rely on cookies and authentication (logging into a website) to map this journey. This has its limits. For example, many websites don't have visitors who log in to the website.
With GA4, there are new identification methods to track users across both platforms and devices. For example, GA4 leverages information about Google users who have logged into Google via their browsers.

These new identification methods preserve privacy while giving marketers more accurate data about users.

REAL-TIME REPORTS

Recently sent an email to your audience? Launched a new product and want to watch engagement? Often, these moments lead to the need for real-time data. What's happening on your website right this second?

Both Universal Analytics and Google Analytics 4 support real-time reports. In Google Analytics 4, we can get even more granular data in our real-time views.

FILTERING & PROPERTY-LEVEL CHANGES

There are many property settings in Universal Analytics which only impact future data. Filters are a good example — if you apply a new filter to a Google Analytics property, then it will impact the data collection moving forward, but there is no way to apply that filter to data from the past.

With Google Analytics 4, there are more settings that you can adjust, which will apply forwards and backward and can even be reverted. This flexibility is powerful!

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG CHANGES

DEBUGGING

Debugging Universal Analytics is tricky; it usually involves jumping between multiple browser windows and tools.

Good news with GA4 — it has a new debug view. You can see every interaction, in the order they occurred. You can click on any interaction and see its metadata to confirm everything is set up correctly. If you use Google Tag Manager in preview mode, it'll dump all of that data into the debug view.

AUDIENCE BUILDING / ADVANCED SEGMENTS

Audience building using advanced segments is an intermediate to advanced Google Analytics skill. This is a feature in both Universal Analytics and GA4.

With Universal Analytics though, we're limited to sessions and user-scoped segments. For example, grouping all visitors who visited a certain page or stayed on the site for a certain length of time.

With GA4, we can additionally create segments based on events. For example, grouping all users who engaged with specific video content on your website or a specific webpage.

We can powerfully utilize permanence in these segments. For example, if you use Google Analytics to build audiences for your Google Ads remarketing campaigns, you may want to stop targeting someone once they make a purchase. But is that considered temporary or permanent? With GA4, we can define these use cases and specify stopping ads for a specific timeframe (say, a month after purchase), then resume remarketing to this audience.

GOALS / CONVERSIONS

Goals allow us to flag user engagement that signals a conversion for our business. For example, for a lead-generating website, a goal may be the completion of a contact form.

In Universal Analytics, goals are permanent and you're only given 20 slots. You have to create goals manually, which can be cumbersome and tricky.

In Google Analytics 4, you're given 30 goal slots, which can be enabled and disabled at will. Goals are flexible and easy to set up (at least for events) with a simple toggle.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG CHANGES

TIME

How long did it take users to complete a form or to check out? Where in our funnel did users drop out? Where did they go afterward?

In Universal Analytics this is hard (or impossible) to evaluate, but with GA4, we can utilize Funnel reports to see drop-off rates, completion rates, elapsed time, and so much more!

NEXT STEPS

All of this change can be overwhelming. Good news — your current Google Analytics property will continue to collect data that you can analyze for the months and years to come.

Google Analytics 4 isn't ready to fully replace Universal Analytics, but there will be a day when you want to make the transition to analyzing marketing performance in GA4.

To get ready for that day, the current recommendation is to employ a dual setup. This means you collect data in two properties in Google Analytics — one for Universal Analytics (the current version) and the other for GA4.

The dual setup gives you the best of both worlds — a Universal Analytics property and a GA4 property. It ensures your data begins collecting in GA4 for future use while the product continues to evolve. And it gives you a sandbox in which to start practicing using the new interface.

5 REASONS BUSY PEOPLE WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GA4

1. **It is a free tool and it's where Google is headed.**
2. **Predictive modeling.**
3. **Tracks multiple devices better**
4. **Tracks different domains**
5. **Integrates with other Google products.**

TAKEAWAY

 Install the GA4 code, start tracking data. Don't worry about understanding the reporting set-up now. GA4 is still in its infancy. Track now, and study the data later when it's further along.

You can hire a company to upgrade for you, if you don't have the budget there are free tutorials to walk you through the process.

Remember, don't get rid of your old universal code. GA4 can work with universal code. You'll want to do parallel reporting while you get used to the new GA4 and while Google continues to build out reporting options.

Want to hire help with GA4? The Brighter Side Marketing client roster is full until June 2021 so until then I recommend hiring Webshine, a talented Search Engine Optimization (SEO) agency I've worked with since 2017.

To contact Webshine directly visit https://www.webshine.com/
(970) 315-2175

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POST NWTMA CONFERENCE ACTION STEPS

Putting GA4 to work for your business

1. Install the GA4 code to your website
   - How to add GA4 property and how to install on website-
     https://youtu.be/iJyGEuiIjOk
   - GA4 setup assistant:
     https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9744165?hl=en

2. Watch videos or listen to podcasts
   - **Google's YouTube channel on analytics**
     https://www.youtube.com/user/googleanalytics
   - **Podcast**
     Social Media Examiner discusses GA4 with Mercer

Be patient it takes a few days for data to start collecting. Don't freak out about how different things look. Give yourself time over the next 6 months to listen to a podcast, watch a webinar and learn more about GA4.