

Lecture: Google Analytics

Web analytics can be defined as the process of analyzing the behavior of visits to a web site. There are a number of endless metrics that any website owner can collect and use to make informed decisions on how to modify their website, such as how to create more traffic, generate more sales, get more subscribers to an email campaign, and more.

To have success in web analytics, the right tools are required to help gather and sort all of this data. Google Analytics has become one of the free industry leading tools for many web owners and Internet marketers. The data business owners can get from Analytics is crucial in deciding where to take the business. With information such as where the traffic is coming from to which pages are getting viewed the most, anybody can take that information and make the necessary adjustments to cater to your traffic. Google Analytics can be a very complex and powerful tool, however in its complexity also lays valuable information that is easy to grasp for the common user who is looking to gather some basic information. This course will focus on the fundamentals of Google Analytics; however there will be additional resources available for students who are more interested in getting more out of Google Analytics.

Installation of the Google Analytics tracking code is not difficult but it does require a Google account. Keep in mind that any Google account that you have that was previously used for other services (such as Gmail or Google Webmaster Tools) can be used here.

To sign up, visit <http://www.google.com/analytics/> webmasters will be prompted to add their website and to fill out information about their website.

At the end of the sign up process, users will be presented with tracking code that must be installed into the section of your website. This code must be installed in your website in such a way that it appears on every page; it is how Google Analytics will

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gather all of the valuable information webmasters need from their traffic. You may need to talk to the person who built your website in order to properly install the Google Analytics code, as the method for getting it on every single page will vary depending on the way your website was built. If you use a common CMS such as WordPress, Joomla, or Droopal, you can generally find plugins that allow you to do this. If your site is hard-coded, there may be an include file that is common to every page where the code could be added. If you have more than one website, you will need separate tracking codes for each website: One code is unique to one website.

Google Analytics will let you know if the tracking code was installed successfully, but be careful—your site will pass this check as long as the Google Analytics code is on the home page. This means that even if you pass the Google Analytics check, the code might NOT be properly installed on every page of your site. The only way to know for sure is to view the source code of each page individually.

However, if installation of the tracking code is successful according to the Google Analytics automatic check, the next page is the Dashboard. Before any more details, it is important to note that the Dashboard is not always the screen displayed when initially logging into Analytics. The first screen that is shown is the Accounts page, which details all websites that have Google Analytics tracking code installed. From here, once you have selected the website you want to view statics for, it will load the “Reporting” dashboard. The “Reporting” dashboard is the default page that most users will end up using which displays very basic but comprehensive data that anyone could use for any purpose.

The most noticeable element of the dashboard is the Audience Overview, which presents a very simple to read line graph of the traffic that has visited your website within the past month. At the top right corner, there is a section where you can change the time frame for the Audience Overview allowing you to view a specific day, week or longer period of time. Below the line graph, there is more specific information in relation to the line graph.

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Looking more in depth into the number of visitors that a website has received, it is possible to see what % of those visitors were unique, how many pages were viewed per visit, how long visitors spent on the website, and most important what % bounced from the website. *Bounce rate* refers to the % of visits that left your site almost as soon as they arrived. For example, if visitor a lands onto your home page and they leave quickly without visiting any other page on your website, that visitor is said to have “bounced” from your site; thus the term *bounce rate*. Obviously, we want to keep our bounce rate fairly low. The most common reasons for a high bounce rate are untrustworthy design, lack of compelling content, or misleading keyword entry (running a search for a keyword and visiting a website that does not reflect the keyword search).

Next to the basic metrics, you have a pie chart splitting the total traffic into New Visits and Repeat Visits. This will allow businesses to decide if this makes sense- if you expect a lot of return traffic because the goal is to hold readership versus seeing a lot of new traffic for ecommerce purchases.

Below all of this information, you will find some demographic and usage data. VERY BASIC information on language, territory and operating system can be found here .To only look at the data displayed on the default dashboard is already a lot of information to digest. However, the data here is arguably too raw and may not present enough specific information to decide what the next move is for your business. In the left hand column lays more detailed breakdown of Audience, Advertising, Traffic Sources, Content, and Conversions.

If you take a look at the left side menu within Google Analytics, you will notice a relatively new section entitled “Intelligence Events”. This section is especially useful for viewing change over time for a variety of metrics. You can view, for example, the percentage of rise or fall in the average visit duration over the past month and learn if a newly designed website is truly more effective than before, or you could observe the change in time for the percent of new visits over the past month to see if you are able to increase the number of returning readers for a blog.

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The Real-Time item on the left menu is exactly what it sounds like: information on visitors in real time. Featured on the Real-Time Overview tab is a live visitor count, letting you know the number of visits on the site at this very moment. Next to that is a graph of pageviews per minute. This section can help you get an idea of the times of day your visitors are most active on your site, where they are coming from, and what time they are coming to your website from those various sources. Perhaps you will discover here that your website gets a lot of Facebook traffic at 9am, or maybe you will discover that organic search visits to your website tend to happen in the evening. Whatever the specific findings of your Real-Time

The Audience section on the left hand side menu provides a look at specific data from the visitors to your website. Much like some of the data shown on the default Dashboard, this section dives into much more detail for the behavior of visitors and what kind of technology web users they are using to view your website.

The Acquisition section provides a more detailed perspective of where traffic is coming from and how visitors ended up on your website. From what search engine visitors are using to specific keywords, (in a small percentage of cases, now that Google does not share certain search data anymore,) website owners can also determine how visitors reached their websites.

The Behavior section helps webmasters understand how visitors behave ON the actual website. On site behavior is arguably even more important than the ability to attract multiple visitors; one visitor who is well engaged is far more valuable than a thousand who bounce right off the page without clicking, reading, downloading, or following anything.

The last selection available is the Conversions section, which does require a tiny bit of extra setup to make use of. To track goals and ecommerce events, Google Analytics needs to first know what those events ARE, and it will only know if you tell it. Luckily, Google has made this process much easier than it used to be, with a wizard to aid in

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setting up your trackable goals and events. There are many different types of goals, and it will be easier to implement tracking for some than others.

With Google Analytics, you can also create custom reports. The benefits of creating custom reports are:

- Save time by creating reports which give you and your stakeholders exactly what you want to see.
- Group together all the info you find most relevant.
- Easily share reports with colleagues so you can make quicker decisions based on data.
- Once created, each custom report is available for as long as you want it.

Creating a custom report is easy. First, click the “Customization” link in the orange top navigation bar. Then, click on “Create Custom Report”. Simply follow Google’s instructions, fill in the blanks, and save your new report.