

Understanding Google Analytics 4

GA4 provides users with a privacy-centric cross-platform measurement solution that will support future industry & customer demands. As advertisers, we need to understand GA4 and capitalize on the opportunities it presents.

The Difference Between GA4 & Universal Analytics



Data Ingestion

Hits to Google Analytics are ingested differently in GA4 compared to UA. With UA, hits are grouped by sessions and users; while in GA4 hits are collected on an event level.



Data Collection

Because of its simplified event & parameter based setup, GA4 is designed to collect data from both websites & apps where UA was mostly only able to collect website data.



Interface

GA4 has less default reports & relies more on users creating their own reports in Explore.



Privacy Functionality

Unlike UA, GA4 has IP address hiding, & works with Consent Mode. It also has built in ML to model the data to fill in gaps caused by users opting out of being tracked.

When?

Universal Analytics (UA) will sunset from the beginning of July 2023. Standard UA properties will stop processing new hits on July 1st 2023. UA360 properties will stop processing new hits on July 1st 2024.

This means that you'll need to upgrade to GA4 before these dates depending on which product you have.

If you have UA360 we recommend upgrading at least **13 months** before the July deadline so that you have a full set of year on year data.

Top Tip

Pay attention to your data. Ask questions and make sure you're familiar with which parts of GA4 you're getting your data from.

Why Was GA4 Created?

GA4 was designed to address 4 main areas: cross device tracking, privacy regulations and updates, advanced insights and data insights and data activation.

/ Cross Device Tracking

UA was launched in 2012 and was designed with the same website tracking principles as Urchin which was created in 2005 before Smart Phones were released. This meant that the product was only suitable for tracking website activity (and not apps). GA4 has been built to track activity across both apps and websites to cater for the current world that we're living in where users are constantly engaging across multiple devices.

/ Privacy Regulations & Updates

GA4 is compatible with Google's Consent Mode which prevents tags from firing when a user opts out of being tracked on a website. When Consent Mode is activated, it prevents tags from collecting cookie information but it enables Conversion Modeling to allow you to bridge the gaps in the data due to lost events from the user disallowing conversion tracking. This helps advertisers to measure conversions while respecting users' privacy wishes.

/ Advanced Insights

GA4 has a tool called Explore which was previously only available in GA360 which allows you to perform advanced data science techniques on your data using a simple drag and drop interface to extract meaningful insights and get the most out of your data.

GA4's built in ML also allows you to do forecasting on your data to predict future trends and user behaviour (e.g. *predictive purchases*, *predicted churn* etc.) and generate audiences based on these predictions. Additionally, GA4 has a native integration with BigQuery which opens up the doors to all business to make use of both BigQuery for advanced analysis as well as the full Google Cloud Platform suite to perform advanced machine learning techniques and data analysis on your data

/ Data Activation

GA4 allows for integration with the full GMP stack which was previously only available in GA360. All audiences and conversions that are generated and tracked in GA4 are automatically shared to all of your linked platforms for activation in your media campaigns.

One major bonus of GA4 is that you can also share audiences with Optimize to perform personalizations on your website which was previously only available with GA360 and Optimize 360.

Why is GA4 Important?

Premium Features

GA4 has many of the premium features available in GA360 for free (*integrations with GMP, BigQuery, advanced data analysis through Explore*), making these features fully accessible to every business. With all of the activation features of GA4 as well as GA4 having the capability to track both app and web, businesses can start moving towards using GA4 as their marketing source of truth.

Availability

Come July 1st 2023 GA4 will become the only Google Analytics product available. This means that every Google Analytics user will need to start becoming comfortable with the new interface and features.

Top Tip

Use GA4 as a chance to readdress your measurement plan and tracking strategy.

It is a great opportunity to ensure you're tracking your most important touch points and user journeys, plus it allows you to rethink how you are using your data to benefit your media campaigns.

Top Tip

Some features of GA4 are currently still in Beta so we don't recommend switching from UA as your reporting source of truth until GA4 is fully out of Beta.

We do however recommend that you use it to generate standard and predictive audiences to use across your media campaigns alongside using some of the reports to get comfortable with navigating the new UI.

Additionally, make sure to implement your GA4 correctly from the get-go to ensure that you have a clean set of data from the start. We recommend using a partner to ensure this is done correctly.



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