



# Google Analytics 4 (GA4)

## Primer

For better or worse, Google Analytics 4 will change the way we look at data.

### WHAT IS GA4?

Google's new flagship analytics product, GA4 represents a complete overhaul of the way we track the customer journey end-to-end. It offers deeper integration options, more automation and expanded predictive analytics capabilities.



Despite it being in beta and many features still being fine-tuned, Google is strongly pushing ahead with GA4, with no more upgrades being made to the “old” version of analytics (Universal Analytics). While it's unlikely that Google will stop

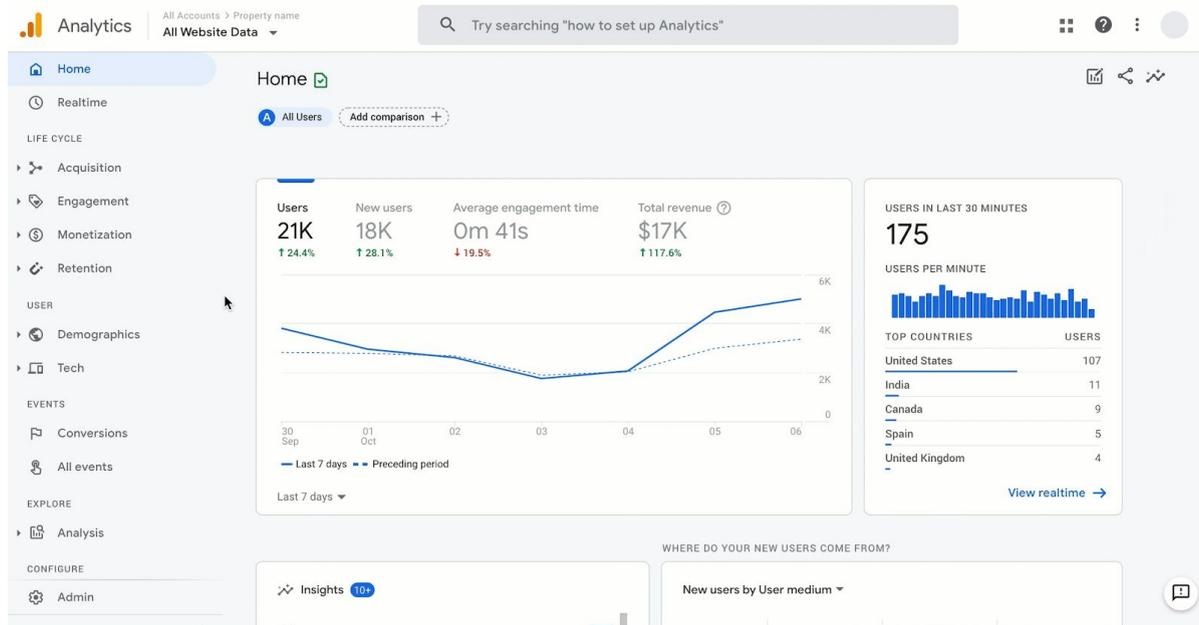
supporting or providing the old version of Google Analytics, it still remains a possibility.

## **WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT GA4?**

GA4 has a completely different data model and therefore presents an opportunity to rethink what information you would like to collect and why. The most important difference is that there's only one hit type (the "event") and you get to be a lot more flexible with which events you capture, and how you analyse them after they've been captured.

**The new codebase will be able to automate and connect more customer actions**, delivering a more streamlined and holistic view of the entire customer life cycle (from acquisition to conversion and retention), while also facilitating advanced users to power up their analytics with extra tracking and analyses features.

**GA4 promises simplified and re-organised reporting too**, though we are yet to see most of this rolled out yet. The new reports should do a better job at highlighting customer lifetime value, and help you find marketing insights based on the part of the customer journey you're interested in. E.g. you can see which channels are driving new customers in the user acquisition report, then use the engagement and retention reports to understand the actions these customers take, and whether they stick around, after converting.



## TECHNICAL FEATURES

Here's a quick rundown of the features GA4 has available:

- Automatic tracking of many events including pageviews, page engagement, scrolling to the bottom of a page, file downloads and outbound link clicks.
- A set of events Google recommends you track (an extension of the old ecommerce reports) which lets Google understand what is happening on your website/app.
- Tracking of up to 25 custom user properties and 50 custom event-based dimensions/metrics (significantly up from the 20 custom dimensions/metrics available in Universal Analytics).
- Rules to edit, clean up or fire new events in GA4 after they're collected.
- A more AI-driven approach with automated insights coming soon (including ones that rely less on individual user cookies/identifiers).
- Up to 200 custom funnels that measure user flow through a sequence of events relevant to your website.

## SMARTER INSIGHTS

Google Analytics 4 has machine learning at its core to automatically surface helpful insights and provide a complete understanding of your customers across devices and platforms. New reports can predict results and churn rates, and new alerts can highlight opportunities in data such as high demand products as they happen, so you can act on opportunities quickly.



User source: Cross-channel last click	↓ Total users	LTV: Total	Churn probability: Average
<b>Totals</b>	<b>43,000</b> 100% of total	<b>\$180,000.00</b> 100% of total	<b>20.0%</b> 100% of total
(direct)	18,000	\$40,000.00	30.9%
google	10,000	\$43,000.00	6.0%
blog.myposts.com	6,000	\$0.00	18.5%
user.co	2,100	\$60,000.00	16.0%
blog.marketing.com	1,500	\$0.00	15.5%
googlemerchandisestore.com	1,300	\$0.00	12.3%
newsletter_september_2020	1,000	\$3,000	11.5%
mall.googleplex.com	900	\$38.60	71.2%
partners	800	\$0.00	60.0%
site.google.com	700	\$17,000.00	10.7%

## DATA OWNERSHIP

Google Analytics 4 also offers better [data ownership and control](#) than ever before, which is crucial to most businesses today and has been on the wishlist from Google Analytics' customers for a long time.

**GA4 will only retain your data for 14 months** but there is the option to export your data via BigQuery. The BigQuery export opens lets you export all of your raw Google Analytics event data. If you were using Google Analytics Standard (free version), there was no ideal method to export or get access to this underlying data in the platform which makes it really challenging to complete advanced analytics tasks like getting unsampled reports, connecting with other reporting/visualization platforms, or integrating with other datasets like your CRM or marketing data warehouse.

The BigQuery integration has a free processing threshold which most standard websites would fit comfortably within. This opens up unprecedented opportunities for you to truly own and perform custom analysis on your data.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

We recommend most websites take the opportunity to set up a new GA4 property, with a refreshed GA4-friendly measurement plan, to run in parallel with your existing Google Analytics property indefinitely. We also recommend that you **set up the BigQuery integration so as to own your data from day one.**

Join our free Facebook [Google Analytics 4 Working Group](#) to keep up to date with new releases and hear how other businesses similar to yours are approaching their integrations.

## **HOW TIME-CONSUMING IS THIS?**

The longest part of this integration is probably mapping out the new GA4 event schema in a way that matches your websites/apps etc. We refer to this end product as a Measurement Plan and we can help you pull this together in consultation with your organisation. After that, if you are already using Google Tag Manager for your current GA setup, there are usually efficient ways to copy over the implementation. If you don't have a current GTM setup, you should probably consider migrating to GTM at the same time, otherwise all the tags will become a huge pain to manage.

## **WHAT ARE THE NON-TIME-BASED COSTS?**

GA4 is free but you would want a BigQuery integration. This gives you 10GB storage and 1TB processing per month for free, which should be more than enough for smaller websites. After that it's \$6.50/TB for queries and 2.3 cents per GB/month. This is still extremely cheap but if you are a high traffic website (eg. several million visits a month), it could eventually add up. We recommend monitoring this regularly which BigQuery can do easily.

## **WHAT ARE THE PROS/CONS OF SETTING UP GA4 NOW VS LATER?**

The data capture in your new GA4 property is not retroactive, so it will only start capturing data from the day it's activated.

Although many features of GA4 aren't finished, setting GA4 up now will mean that you start building up your dataset and the machine learning can start building its knowledge. You can already do plenty of useful things in GA4 that you can't in your current free version of Google Analytics (eg. custom funnels) but the more historical data you have when more new features are added, the better results you'll get.

The later you do this, the less data you'll have at hand to make the more decisions from. In the [extremely unlikely] event that Google decides to stop supporting the older Google Analytics altogether, not implementing this in advance could lead to a deadline-driven scramble which makes it more likely that things will be missed.

## **WHAT DO I DO WITH MY OLD ANALYTICS ACCOUNT?**

Keep it. There has been no talk of ever being able to merge your old and new analytics properties and data migration hasn't been an option in past iterations of Google Analytics upgrades. You will need to hold onto your old data for historical reporting and analyses. You should also keep collecting new customer actions into your old property as well, since many of the reports/insights are still easier obtained through Universal Analytics.

## OUR GA4 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Even if you're an existing client, we will run this as a separate project in order to take the opportunity to step back and really think about what data should be collected.

The project involves:

- An audit of your current websites and tracking (for existing clients this will be almost instant)
- A workshop between us and your key stakeholders to work out the GA4 measurement plan that will balance giving all teams what they need and implementation time, as well as future-proofing.
- Setup of the GA4 property and data streams, including BigQuery as your direct data ownership source.
- Setup of the GA4 tags in your Google Tag Manager account.
- Initial analysis and recommendations.
- If required, ongoing monitoring of new GA4 features and implementation if appropriate. Google is developing this product very fast so watch this space!

Contact us to learn more about how you can start building your GA4 data and transition your reporting and insights smoothly.

Join our Facebook [Google Analytics 4 Working Group](#).

**BOOK A QUICK CHAT/CALL**