July 2024

Google Analytics 4 - What You Need to Know

Paulyn Ocampo

GOOGLE ANALYTICS 4 – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Paulyn Ocampo; Vice President of Client and Agency Operations at The Hodges Partnership

If you have a website, it's likely that you or someone on your team are already familiar with Google Analytics and are using it to analyze site traffic. If you're new to Google Analytics, now is a great time to take advantage of this web analytics tool. As part of that analysis, you may be looking at how visitors reach your site (e.g., direct, organic, or paid traffic) and the interactions they're making during their time on your site (sessions). On July 1, 2023, Google sunsetted its previous version of Google Analytics, also known as Universal Analytics (UA), and launched a new version, Google Analytics 4 (GA4).
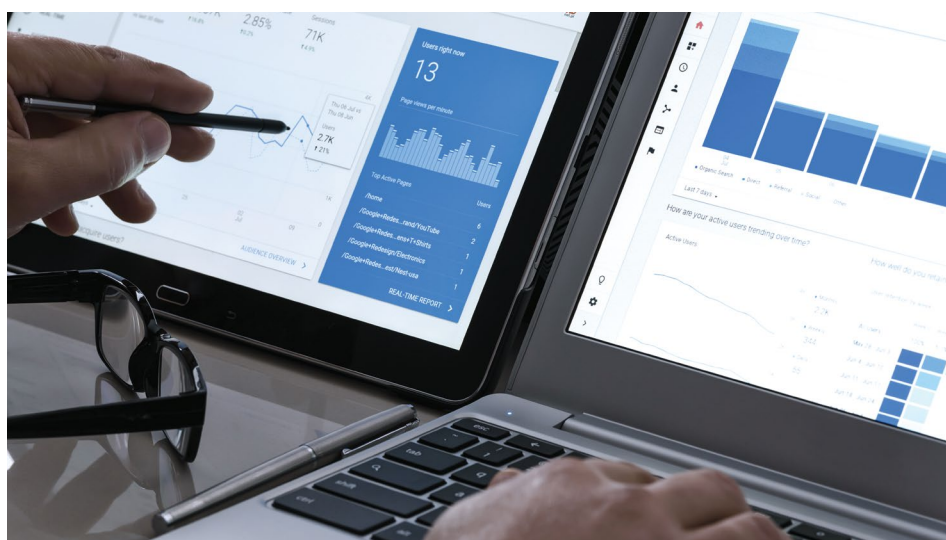

The differences between Universal Analytics and GA4

One of the key differences between UA and GA4 is how user data is measured and presented. Where UA relied on a session-based model, GA4 focuses on user events. In this new model, GA4 tracks each user interaction (clicks, downloads, scrolling on a page, completing a purchase, etc.) as an individual event rather than grouping the events together as a session. In GA4, website owners also have the ability to define custom events. This means you can track and measure whether a visitor to your website downloaded a new patient form, clicked to learn more about your practice, or clicked to look at your online schedule to view open appointment times.

Another key difference between the two is that GA4 offers enhanced measurement capabilities, including the ability to track users across multiple devices and platforms, which provides a more holistic view of visitors' behavior.

What do these changes mean?

For the most part, the biggest change for marketers is getting used to a new user interface. The same data that was available in UA is also available in GA4, but where to find that data and how to navigate to those reports is different. What once used to be accessible in a few clicks now takes more time, as setting up a report to give you the data you're looking for takes more configuration. As users become more comfortable and versed with the new user experience (UX), most will find GA4 allows you to build reports that are more tailored to the insights your practice needs. You can build reports that would not have been possible to build in UA, but it requires a deeper understanding of the platform.

Additionally, there are metrics that can be tracked in GA4 that aren't as easily tracked in UA, including engagement rate, video engagement, scrolling, file downloads, outbound link clicks, and site search. To access this data, you'll need to enable enhanced measurement in GA4.

Ready to get started with GA4?

To begin using GA4 on your website, here are some steps to get started:

- First, you'll want to set up a GA4 property in your Google Analytics account.
- Once you've set up your GA4 property, you'll want to install the GA4 tracking code on your website.
- After setting up your GA4 property, you'll want to then add a data stream. The data stream is what sends data from your website to your GA4 property.
- To track conversions (such as downloads, form submissions and purchases) you'll need to set up conversion tracking in GA4.

The list above is a simplified version of the steps involved in setting up GA4. For more detailed information on implementing GA4 on your website, Google has some great resources available, and a number of other online tutorials can be found with a quick search.