42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics

A Practical Guide for Understanding Web Traffic, Visitors, and Analytics So You Can Improve the Performance of Your Website

ROB SANDERS

FOREWORD BY: MICHAEL B. LEHMANN
42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics

By Rob Sanders
Foreword by Michael B. Lehmann
Praise For This Book!

"Rob Sanders has helped me to analyze and manage successful campaigns for clients from Fortune 500 companies to non-profits. In this book, he gives step by step, no-nonsense advice so you can do the same for your business, using Google Analytics. Read it and learn!"

Cathy Clifton, Brix Direct, E-Commerce Consulting

"Rob does an outstanding job of outlining the rules and methodology used by Google Analytics and presents a plausible plan for maximizing the marketing potential of this important tool."

Robert Wucher, Principle, Wucher & Associates

"42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics is a great resource for anyone interested in learning how to use, or make better use of, Google Analytics."

Seth Rosenberg, Senior Vice President, Sales & Marketing, Equity LifeStyle Properties

"Rob's 42 Rules are invaluable for gaining an understanding of all the moving pieces within Google Analytics. This is a must read for anyone who intends to tackle the task of growing their organization online. Even those who intend to use an SEO consultant will see value as they will be able to ask the right questions and "talk the talk" with their consultant."

Thomas Lyle, CEO, Frontdesk Anywhere Inc
Dedication

To my wife, Kathy, for showing me what patience and professionalism is all about.

To my employees at RSO Consulting for their support, assistance, feedback, and enthusiasm.

To my clientele that waited, waited, and waited some more for the book to finally be published after months of anticipation.

Finally, to my editor, Laura Lowell, who patiently worked with me throughout the entire process without giving up hope that I would indeed go to print.
Acknowledgments

A number of people contributed to this book. It would be impossible to list every name and acknowledge everyone I've worked with over the past few years. I am grateful for their time and energy, experiences, and insights as it has influenced my perceptions of Google Analytics.

I would like to thank the following people who provided support, feedback, ideas, quotes, and tidbits of information: Kiana Sharifi, Cathy Clifton, Thomas Lyle, Marina Quilez, Dew Chinsakchai, and John Little. Without their input, the book would not be what it is.
My mother said to me, "If you are a soldier, you will become a general. If you are a monk, you will become the Pope." Instead, I was a painter, and became Picasso.

Pablo Picasso
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Foreword by Michael B. Lehmann

Let me introduce you to Rob Sanders' *42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics* by telling you why I read it.

I've taught economics for over 40 years at the University of San Francisco and I am the author of the best-selling *Irwin Guide to Using the Wall Street Journal*. The news media frequently seek my views on the business and investment climate. I also developed a successful seminar for corporate training. But when I decided to branch out into online education and develop my seminar *Be Your Own Economist®* for Web distribution, I knew I needed help.

That's why I turned to Rob Sanders. Rob brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the world of online marketing. He currently works with a diverse group of companies by providing creative and technical solutions for online growth, including overseeing their search-engine marketing, social networking, blogs, and video. Rob will help me market my course using Google Analytics and his wealth of online-marketing knowledge. Now you, too, can gain access to the world of online marketing by reading Rob's *42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics*.

Business is moving to the web, and any up-to-date business venture must have a web presence. But how can you make best use of the web to market your product, yourself, or your ideas? You just don't have the training and experience. That's where *42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics* comes in. It will share with you a visitor's experience when browsing through your site. You can begin to understand your site from a visitor's perspective.
How does a visitor react to the information and graphics you provide? To understand this you must leave the world of the amateur and enter the domain of the professional. *42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics* will show you how marketing professionals measure, collect, and analyze data from your site's performance. What sells and what doesn't sell? Once you have learned how to evaluate your results, you can begin to tailor your site to your customers' needs and preferences. That will mean more visits to your site, more sales, and better all around success. Your competitors are doing it, so should you.

Guesswork and flying by the seat of your pants no longer works in the modern world of web and mobile marketing. Metrics are key. Marketing requires measurement, not guesswork. Let this book be your gateway to tracking website behavior and website performance. Whether you are an advertiser, publisher, or business owner, this book will help you write better ads, strengthen your marketing initiatives, and create higher-conversion web pages.

I am confident you will enjoy and benefit from *42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics* as much as I did.

*Michael B. Lehmann*
Emeritus Professor of Economics
University of San Francisco
The objective of this book can be akin to my mission statement about Google Analytics. First, it is to educate "beginners" or those new to Google Analytics on how to best use the tool and its features. My other personal objective would be to have people use this book as a reference guide. Unfortunately, most of the books published on web analytics are big, thick, clunky, and really intimidating, especially for those recently introduced to Google Analytics. Do these books contain a lot of good, insightful information? Absolutely. Are they manageable in terms of reading and using the material being introduced? That's my point of contention.

I would also go as far as saying this book is a necessity for those novices given that it contains a lot of the same information in summarized form that is easily digestible. As a professional online marketer, I am always showing my clients things about Google Analytics that they would not otherwise have known. Over the past few years, this permeated into blog posts, webinars, speaking engagements, lectures, and then, a book deal.
I've been using Google Analytics from almost day one. In fact, I was an avid user of the Urchin software until Google acquired the company in 2005.

Google Analytics has stayed true to what Urchin was. According to Google Analytics, that means creating a web site analytics solution used by web site owners and marketers to better understand their users' experiences, optimize content, and track marketing performance.

I use Google Analytics daily and depend on it for my business as an online marketing consultant. It's been a relationship that has grown organically stronger over the years. Interestingly, I don't have a personal relationship with anyone at Google. I feel it is not entirely necessary. They have built one of the best user-friendly web analytics products available and continue to improve on it. With that in mind, I know that I can count on reliable data that will allow me to effectively and easily communicate and train my clients, employees, and just about anyone with a website that is interested in knowing results.

Simply put, Google Analytics allows me to make informed decisions. In turn, I can paint a picture based on the data and provide suggestions, comments, recommendations, advice, examples, and a lot more. But all of this is from my perspective and the rules outlined in this book are mine, based on my experience. Some of these rules may work for some readers and others may not. It is all based on their business, strategy, and objectives.
The topics or "rules" in this book are geared towards non-techie types like marketers, business owners, data enthusiasts, consultants, and various stakeholders who don't have time or patience to master the ins-and-outs of Google Analytics. Instead, they rely on someone like me to provide a high-level overview and low-level details they seek. If you are comfortable with Google Analytics, or see yourself as an above average to expert user, then my hope is that you will still learn something or take away some tidbits of knowledge.

My rules cover the gamut of what Google Analytics has to offer in terms of everyday features. So, if you are one of those people that see time as a precious commodity, then giving you rules to abide by will arm you with a level of understanding that you can apply as you see fit.

What are the rules, you ask? Well, read the book and find out! But as you read each chapter, don't lose sight of the fact that these rules can be broken and applied as you see fit based on your needs. For example, if you have multiple websites or only one website then you may approach setting up profiles completely different than what I mention in Rule 31, "Profile Your Data". However, if you do agree with my recommendations then you will be on your way to benefiting from all that Google Analytics has to offer.
Part I
Preparation: What You Need to Know before You Begin

The content in this section is intended to prepare you for all the great features Google Analytics has to offer. Before embarking on more specific and challenging tasks, you have to begin with the right mindset. After reading this section, you'll have a better understanding of what lies ahead.

- Rule 2: Why Google Analytics?
- Rule 3: Learn to Read…the Data, That Is
- Rule 4: Understand the Language
- Rule 5: Keep It Simple, Silly
- Rule 6: Think like an End User
- Rule 7: Identify Key Metrics
- Rule 8: Identify Conversions
- Rule 9: Assign Monetary Values
Rule 2

Why Google Analytics?

Why Google Analytics? The broad response is that Google Analytics provides all your web analytics data for your website or blog in one easy-to-use platform.

There are no limitations or requirements for using Google Analytics. You can be an entrepreneur or small business owner. You can work for a large corporation and manage a small or large team. Best of all, Google Analytics is absolutely free! Google Analytics is not a "get what you pay for" free product. It competes directly with other analytics programs that charge a rather substantial monthly fee. Installing it is simple and you can follow multiple websites using just one account.

What sets Google Analytics apart from its competitors is that it is aimed at marketing professionals. Marketing managers especially need the information about their marketing campaigns so they can see what works and what doesn't. For example, it would be important to know if a key web page associated with a particular marketing or promotional campaign was not receiving any visitors. The power of Google Analytics will provide that information in a timely manner via reporting or alerts (see Rule 13, "Use Your Intelligence").

The interface in Google Analytics is easy to use yet sophisticated enough for the advanced user. Most other analytics platforms are aimed at tech-types and webmasters who gave rise to the technology to begin with. With Google Analytics, you can set up automated, customized reporting and receive a multitude of reports. You can receive a summary of all data, or a specific report...
for a particular time span. The benefit is that Google Analytics reports will save you the time of having to go through each individual analytical section.

Furthermore, there is a lot of support from Google, third party vendors, "Google Analytics Authorized Consultants," forums, blogs, articles, and websites dedicated to assisting users (see Rule 41, "Know Where to Seek Help").

However, Google Analytics is not without its limitations. For example, reports are not generated in "real time" and users may have trouble browsing from mobile phones. I expect Google to rectify these issues over time. Regardless of the current issues, the benefits clearly outweigh the downsides for gathering web analytics data.

With Google Analytics enabled on your website you can track where traffic is coming from, from which referring website, to which landing page, and what search engine and keyword was used. It can also tell you about the visitor’s location, how they found your site, their operating system, browser, and even monitor resolution! It gives you a snapshot of how much time the visitor spent on your site, the number of pages visited, the bounce rate (percentage of users who viewed only one page before leaving), along with the conversion rate. Oh, and if that is not enough, it gives you precise data on your past and current traffic. You get the point. Google Analytics has a lot to offer.

I foresee Google Analytics being the central focal point or "one-stop shop" for all data related to other Google products, including YouTube, Insights, Webmaster Tools, and more. For now, Google Analytics, on its own, is loaded with informative data that will tell you the "when," "why," "where," and "how" as it relates to your website.
Rule 3

Learn to Read…the Data, That Is

Data is a precious thing and will last longer than the systems themselves.
- Tim Berners-Lee, Inventor of the World Wide Web and Director of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

Before web analytics, people with a product or service to sell online had to play a sort of poker game to win their customer; they hedged their bets, and hoped or prayed. Whether a visitor was just browsing your website, or a serious shopper was ready to make a purchase, gathering data to gain customer knowledge was like crossing the seven seas on a boat. It was a navigational nightmare. Now it is easier thanks to Google Analytics. Reading the data in Google Analytics gives you the power to know more about your customers and to differentiate the casual from the serious.

Data, in this context, means information related to a website’s traffic. Website traffic is generated when a visitor directly types in the URL of your website in the web browser, clicks on a link in a search engine, or clicks on a link from another “referring” website.

Google Analytics collects and buckets the data into several categories. This categorization allows you to focus on visitors’ behavioral patterns in order to better understand the type of people visiting and the nature of their visit.

Why and how is reading this data important for you, the website owner? Well, website traffic is the only aspect of your website that is monetized. Reading the data correctly will also increase the value of your website when the quality of the traffic gets better.
Here are some helpful hints to analyzing and measuring the data better:

- If you have an e-commerce site, then identify which traffic sources lead to revenue. Google Analytics has an overview section that allows you to see e-commerce by source, number of transactions, and the specific product sold (see Rule 32, "Measure e-Commerce Data").
- When analyzing your traffic, avoid focusing on just a single metric. For example, pageviews alone is not actionable because you don't know what the number really means. But, pageviews in the context of other metrics, like time on site, help you get a clearer picture.
- Use calculated metrics, such as return on investment (ROI), conversion rate, and cost per acquisition when performing "apple-to-apple" metric comparisons versus raw data, such as visits or pageviews.
- Use the graph mode whenever applicable to compare two metrics. Visualization always leads to a better understanding of the data.
- When in graph mode, focus on analyzing trends and identify any unique peaks or valleys in the data set. Google Analytics allows you to enter in a custom date range, compare that date range to the past, and view the data by day, week, or month.
- Ask yourself questions like, "Did visits increase or did each visitor look at more pages?"

Understanding how to read the data will move you closer to understanding your customers. More importantly, reading the data correctly will enable you with the knowledge to know when, why, where, to what extent, and which of your products and/or services meet your customer needs.
Rule 4

Understand the Language

The greatest obstacle to international understanding is the barrier of language.
- Christopher Dawson, English Scholar

In order to get the most out of your Google Analytics account, you need to understand the language of analytics. Without that knowledge, increasing the performance of your website will be difficult.

Understanding the language of Google Analytics will give you the answers you need to improve and refine the content and layout of your website. The benefits will allow you to drive more traffic and convert more business. But like any foreign language, it can be difficult for a non-native speaker. This is especially so in the online marketing world where buzzwords come and go and tech-related verbiage is an everyday part of the language. There are also a lot of acronyms, including, but not limited to, CPA (cost per action), CPC (cost per click), CTR (click through rate), PPC (pay per click), and SEM (search engine marketing). Don’t worry; I will cover most of these acronyms in later chapters. You can also refer to the Appendix A: Glossary for definitions.

Take the Chinese language, for example. It has thousands of separate characters and a vast vocabulary. Google Analytics is similar, in that the degree of information is endless. Some of the data can be easily understood without additional analysis. Other data may have multiple meanings or be difficult to comprehend, especially when combined with other metrics. For example, if someone told you that approximately 80 percent of your clicks came from natural results you need to know that...
"natural" is synonymous with "organic" and "SEO." You also need to know that when it comes to organic search, "clicks" really mean "visits."

Another common mistake usually made in the language of Google Analytics is the use of the word, "search engine marketing" (SEM). SEM encompasses all of the activities undertaken to promote a product or service via a search engine. This means search engine optimization (SEO) and/or pay per click (PPC). I find that most people improperly refer to SEM as just PPC, when in fact PPC is a part of SEM. Another example would be the misuse of "hit" in web analytics to mean visitors or page views. A "hit" is a request for a file from a server, regardless of what type of file, and are in no way a measure of the number of visitors that view a site.

As you can see, understanding the language isn't so clear-cut. For example, visits and clicks may seem similar but are defined differently and almost always show different numbers. This is because some visitors may have clicked on an advertisement and then later, during a different session, returned directly to the site through a bookmark. I found that this discrepancy happens most often with e-commerce related sites that offer coupons or deals. Savvy users will bookmark a product page or coupon download page in their browser as a shortcut. Understanding the difference between clicks and visitors will certainly come in handy.

Could you really make significant improvements to the performance of your website if you had this data? Not likely...if you do not really know what it means. Knowing the acronyms, common terms, and definitions will help you to get started in learning the language. (Definitions of key terms are included in Appendix A.)

Starting with the basic terms and expanding your grasp of the "analytics language" over time is the best approach. In addition, learn the acronyms first. Not knowing what CPC means could have a financial impact. Understanding the lingo of Google Analytics may take time, but it is not difficult. You will find that you will be conversing in a language you never thought possible.
Let's face it, any program or tool can be difficult to master even for the most experienced among us. Google Analytics is no different. It can be complex, intricate, and at times intractable. Worst of all, it can inundate us with too much data and choices. The trick is to "KISS" all that it has to offer—that is, Keep It Simple, Silly. Whether you are the most experienced user or know next to nothing about Google Analytics, you can use a few simple tips to help KISS better in order to maximize your efforts.

**Know the Basics**

This may seem obvious to some, but to others, especially those viewing Google Analytics for the first time, the jargon may be a bit foreign. If you focus on these basic but important areas, you will be off to a good start in understanding most of what is reported.

- **Arrival method**: How are people finding you? Google Analytics breaks traffic down into three areas: Direct Traffic (visitors coming directly to your URL), Search Engines (visitors coming to your website via a search engine) and Referring Sites (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, etc.). For search engines, Google Analytics even breaks down the data between organic search and paid search. Understand why traffic is being driven or not being driven via one of these areas.
• **Bounce rate**: this is the percentage of visitors who went to one page only and left your site. The higher this number, the more people are leaving immediately. You need to ask yourself, "Why?" and then use the data you have available to find out.
• **Content**: What pages do people spend the most time on? Are your products/services pages attracting any visits? What about your blog?
• **Keywords**: What keywords are people finding your site with? Are the keywords relevant and converting?
• **Location**: Where is the traffic coming from? If you are local and receiving national attention then you might review your geo-targeting, or expand your business.

**Create the Dashboard**

Dashboards help you visualize and track trends on every level of your business. They also help to align activities with key goals while keeping you on top of vital statistics and key performance indicators (KPIs). In simpler terms, dashboards are there to communicate the performance of one or more metrics (starting with the metrics mentioned above). With colored bars and nice graphs trending over time, dashboards can be easy to look at and help you gauge your website's overall performance. (See Rule 17, "Customize Your Dashboard," for more information.)

**Set up Reporting**

You are probably very busy just trying to keep your head above water. But if you have taken the time to understand a few metrics and have gone as far as setting up a dashboard then you might as well take that final plunge and set up automated reports. It's the old saying in business, "You cannot manage what you cannot measure." Therefore, automated reports delivered to your email inbox weekly or monthly will establish a good habit of viewing your Google Analytics data.

Keeping these three tips in mind will help you keep it simple. Otherwise, you can easily fall prey to the mountain of data that Google Analytics has to offer and not know where to begin.
Think like an End User

It is important to remember that most of your site's visitors have very little patience, and can be easily distracted by all the jazz in your website that leads to nowhere. Functionality, relevance, and immediacy are key touch points in all sites.

Successful, revenue generating websites are gauged by traffic (to a degree) and by meeting website goals, not by buzz. To reach the pinnacle of success with your website, it is imperative that you think like an end user, not a site owner. Below are some ideas that can help you with your transition from seeing things like a site owner to seeing things like an end-user, along with a means of measuring your work.

Have a Clear Message

Make your website message loud and clear. If you are selling French perfumes online, say that right up front. Make sure the call to action is at the forefront of the site rather than flashy images that do not call for measurable and tangible action (like buying your perfume). Avoid masking your message with design. In Google Analytics, the measurement of success will be a decrease in bounce rate (e.g. viewing more than one page) and an increase in the amount of time visitors spend on your site.

Make It Easy to Navigate

The navigation of your website is the single most important element in creating an accessible and usable website. Therefore, a visitor should not...
feel challenged when using your site. Users should be able to go where they want on your site, quickly and easily. Period. The measurement of success in Google Analytics will be an increase in pageviews.

**Remember the Shopping Cart**

If you are selling something online, consider your credibility and your customers' peace of mind when deciding on a shopping cart. Default shopping carts are best avoided; always go for a branded shopping cart to lend credibility. Choose a shopping cart that includes features such as cross-sell, multiple add-to-cart, and other direct call to actions. You cannot be too careful when it involves your customers' money! The measurement of success in Google Analytics will be an increase in transactions and revenue.

**You've Got Mail**

Have you ever visited a website that looked impressive, professionally designed, and well written, but were unable to find the phone number? Don't make the mistake of sending prospects hunting for your contact information. Put your phone number/contact details in a prominent position. The best practice would be at the top of each page in the same, consistent location. The measurement of success in Google Analytics would be an increase in conversions (e.g. recorded calls and contact submissions).

Applying these best practices may just translate into better website performance metrics in Google Analytics.

At the very least, taking action on your website will help you better understand how your visitors are behaving by measuring the success. You can use Google Analytics to continue to improve upon the work you have already put into your website.
Identify Key Metrics

Managers and investors alike must understand that accounting numbers are the beginning, not the end, of business valuation. - Warren Buffett, American Investor and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway

Within the language of analytics, there are several essential acronyms you need to understand in order to analyze the data in Google Analytics. Among the long list of acronyms in Google Analytics there are three that stand out among the rest because they are directly tied to results (mainly e-commerce results). Those three metrics are: conversion rate (CR), cost per action (CPA) and return on investment (ROI).

Conversion Rates (CR)

In the world of online marketing, a conversion rate is the ratio of visitors who “convert” a visit into a desired action such as email opt-ins, product sales, white paper downloads, and subscription signups. The calculation is simply the number of conversions divided by the number of visits or clicks if you are measuring pay per click performance. For example, if you had 100 visitors to your website on a given day and five of those visitors subscribed to your e-newsletter, then your conversion rate would be five percent.

Cost per Action (CPA)

A cost per action, also known as cost per order, cost per lead, or cost per conversion, is the advertising cost you pay for one completed action/order/lead/conversion. CPA is calculated by dividing the total advertising cost by total completed actions. For example, if last month you spent $1,000 on advertising to generate
2,000 visitors and 20 of them subscribed to your newsletter, your cost per action for a newsletter subscription is $50, or $1000 divided by 20.

Ideally, you want the lowest cost per action possible. In other words, the less amount of money you pay for a lead or conversion, the better. Of course, you may not mind paying a higher CPA, depending on the number of purchases a visitor made over time and their lifetime value. But in most cases, a low CPA is desired.

**Return on Investment (ROI)**

Return on investment is the most common profitability ratio for an online business. ROI is simply a comparison of how much you spent versus how much you made. Measuring ROI for online campaigns is a huge advantage over offline advertising, such as newspapers, magazines, radio or television, where this level of ROI is difficult to measure.

To calculate ROI, subtract the ad cost from the revenue generated. For example, if you spent $500 on an advertising campaign and sold $1,500 worth of product as a result, then the ad profit is $1,000. Then divide the ad profit by the ad cost. In this case, your ad profit is $1,000 and your ad cost is $500, so your ROI would be 100 percent.

CR, CPA, and ROI have a purpose and cannot be understated. They help you pinpoint the success of each marketing initiative and how much of your budget is allocated to each. What's great is that Google Analytics automatically measures the goal conversion rate and return on investment for you so you don't have to worry about the calculations.
Rule 8

Identify Conversions

A conversion can have multiple definitions, depending on the objective of the website or business. For example, it can be turning a website visitor into a prospect or lead if you are selling a service. It could also be converting a prospective visitor into a customer if you are selling a product. Conversion types come in many forms so there is no excuse not to identify at least one. Google Analytics is a handy tool that every website owner should use in order to assist in identifying conversions. Would a carpenter work without a ruler? Would a doctor work without a stethoscope? Would an accountant work without a calculator? Obviously not. So why would you, the website owner, work without your most important tool?

Here are some types of conversion activities that you could consider:

- Email opt-ins
- Newsletter signups
- Form submissions
- Product sales
- Coupon downloads
- White paper downloads
- Case study downloads
- Videos watched
- Forwards to friends
- Sharing of articles via social media websites
- Blog comments
- "Follows" on Twitter
- "Likes" on Facebook
- Phone calls
Most of the above desired actions are measurable in Google Analytics. They can also be applicable to anything, including social media. For example, suppose you are using Twitter to drive sales because your product requires a level of engagement with prospects. Therefore, the conversion could take the form of a specific number of tweets, re-tweets, and/or follows.

Still not sure you have identified one or all of your conversions? Then take the following into account.

- Review your organization’s mission statement to better understand the business goals and objectives
- Maintain focus on what your website does and why
- For large organizations, collaborate with differing internal departments
- Identify your marketing objectives
- Eliminate competing objectives, create a hierarchy, and then sequence objectives
- Review historical data
- Identify short-term (six months to a year) and long-term (a year or more) conversions
- Consider your visitor’s background, knowledge, language, etc.

Identifying conversions is a process that can include your customers, colleagues, and stakeholders. Conversions need to be an integral part of your organization. Achieving success is a team effort and company-wide initiative. Suppose you are a startup company or marketing a new product. Then it is important to identify whom your “conversions” are in order to build visibility for the company or product.

Even if you are a marketing manager for a big brand and create a lot of chatter across the web then you will have to identify multiple conversions. Your efforts should be focused on finding what drives the most results for your business. This single objective of choosing conversions, regardless of how big or small your business is, will have a long-term impact and contribute the highest revenue potential over all other objectives.

The bottom line is that it is never too late to identify a conversion for your website. Conversions are your best friend in Google Analytics—they help you understand and identify the successes and failures of your website, which, in turn, will allow you to reach marketing goals faster.
Rule 9

Assign Monetary Values

Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game.


When working with Google Analytics, you will want to assign a monetary value to any conversion you define. This is the most effective way to evaluate the true value of a visitor who converts on a desired action. Failing to do so could result in omission of critical data. You may also find it difficult to measure key metrics, such as ROI or CPA.

Most business websites measure incoming revenue based on the number of conversions, so assigning monetary values help keep tabs on your revenue stream. It also helps you to showcase the monetary value of your site to the website’s stakeholders. There’s no value in saying, “Our site has 355 newsletter signups, 260 comments, 20 leads generated from submissions, 900 social shares, 76 RSS subscriptions, and 286 account registrations.” The true value is in adding the all-important rider: “...This represents $50,000 in value to our business, up 20 percent from last month.”

You can assign a monetary value to a conversion by following these best practices:

First, specify a name that you will recognize when viewing the goals within each set of your reports. Example: “email signup,” “newsletter signup,” or “article download.”

Second, identify pages in a defined “funnel” or the path that you expect visitors to take on their way to converting to the goal (see Rule 20, “Convert Your Visitors”). This will help you determine where visitors drop off during the conversion path.
Third, assign a monetary value for the goal. For example, if you are able to close 10 percent of your prospects/leads that are generated via your "contact us" page and your average transaction is $500, then you might assign $50 (10 percent of $500) as the value of your "contact us" goal. In contrast, if only one percent of mailing list signups result in a sale, you might only assign $5 (one percent of $500) to your "email signup" goal.

Monetary goal values give a holistic view of which traffic sources perform the best. Google Analytics uses an assigned goal value to calculate ROI, per visit goal value, and other important metrics. You can measure the real performance of traffic coming to your site by using the goal conversion rate, which treats all goals equally by adjusting the weight for each goal against the per visit goal value. You may discover that your email campaigns have a higher conversion rate compared to your PPC campaigns, but a lower per visit goal value.

When considering the monetary goal value for a conversion, don't focus solely on the absolute value. Take into account the relative value of each goal. For example, a blogger may find that a posted comment is a more valuable conversion than a "contact us" form submission.

In the case of PPC campaigns, goals with a monetary value can help you determine the true outcome for each active campaign. In other words, it can quickly tell you if you are making money or losing money. This is essential information for how to best optimize your PPC spending. You can go even further by comparing revenue per click against cost per click. You could be under spending on a PPC campaign that has a low average conversion rate but high revenue per click and vice versa. But you won't know unless you actually assign monetary goal values.

Finally, try to be as accurate as possible when assigning a monetary goal value. This will only lead to more accurate data and better decision making. However, with that said, monetary goal values can be changed at any time so don't fret. Just assigning a monetary value is an important step to effectively using Google Analytics.
Part II
Monitoring: What You Need to Focus on to Make Decisions

The content in this section is intended to help you maintain focus on some of the important aspects of working with Google Analytics. Some of those aspects include understanding your visitors and introducing best practices.

- Rule 10: Understand Visitor Intent
- Rule 11: Understand Visitor Behavior
- Rule 12: Practice Kaizen
- Rule 13: Use Your Intelligence
- Rule 14: Benchmark Your Data
- Rule 15: Choose Keywords Wisely
- Rule 16: Do the Two-Step with Your Content
Rule

10

Understand Visitor Intent

If you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be in danger in every single battle.
- Sun Tzu, The Art of War

What is your website worth? This million-dollar question depends on the number of visitors, pageviews, time on site, and visitor's intent. The last factor is not only the most intriguing but also arguably the most important.

The intent of a visitor is the primary reason they went to the website in the first place. Visitor intent could be information gathering, picture or video viewing, new product review, price comparison, or idle browsing.

Why Is Visitor Intent Important?

Whether you are selling to customers or directly to other businesses, information on visitor intent provides you with enough data to know exactly what your customer is looking for. You can then prepare and provide accordingly.

It also gives you insight into a visitor's interest. It will help to distinguish between value-add and non-value-add content and to understand what is missing. If a thousand visitors came to your site looking for product X and did not find it, there is an opportunity for you to add product X to the site.

How Do You Measure Visitor Intent?

Customer surveys and research reports are two traditional methods adopted by businesses to understand the needs and motivations of their end customers. Another method can be found right in Google Analytics. We have all seen the
small search box on most websites where visitors can type in a keyword to specifically search for content. Imagine searching for something on Amazon.com without using a search box...that's how important a tool this is. Using the internal site search feature in Google Analytics will allow you to track how people use the search box on your site and what these visitors are actually looking for.

![Figure 1: Site Search Overview](image)

Using internal site search data, which is located under the "Content" section, shows how many visitors used this feature along with results per search request. Referencing this data is a very systematic approach to collecting visitor intent. The following is recommended in order to make the most of this feature.

- Figure out the percentage of visitors using site search by reviewing historical data (six months or longer).
- Note the search items in order of number of searches to prioritize addition of new content.
- Try to understand what the visitor was doing prior to the search—correlate that with the keyword query to help further understand the intent of the user.

Internal site search provides valuable insight into the visitor's intent by providing a list of keywords that were searched for. It also helps you understand what activities occurred, such as a purchase, a download, or a prolonged browsing session. The combination of the two provides a solution to produce content and retain visitors coming to a website looking for a particular topic.
In just a few years, Google Analytics has completely transformed how you measure your website's performance. No longer is measuring website performance just for developers and technology professionals, nor is it gauged solely on tracking hits. Using Google Analytics has now shifted to marketers, designers, small business owners, and business executives, all of whom seek answers to more complex questions about website behavior.

It is no longer about just getting visitors but rather turning those visitors into customers…and it all starts with understanding visitor behavior.

Whether you know it or not, the people who visit your website are doing you a favor by helping you improve site performance, telling you what's working or not working, and growing your business. That's why there is an entire section in Google Analytics dedicated to just visitors. To assist in understanding visitor behavior, you can adopt the following key performance indicators (KPI).

**Bounce Rate**: Google Analytics defines a bounce as any visit where the visitor views only one page on the site, and then does something else like clicking on a link to a page on a different website, closing an open window or tab, typing a new URL, clicking the "back" button to leave the site, or perhaps the user doesn't do anything and a session timeout occurs. A high bounce rate can indicate a poor site experience, irrelevant content, or confusion on the part of the visitor.
the contrary, you should expect high bounce rates for pay per click landing pages or sites with very minimal content.

**Time on Site:** this is calculated by generating time stamps on a visit to every page and then calculating the difference between the last and first time-stamp of a visitor session. In case of a bounce, time on site and time on page are both reported as 00:00 minutes. Keep in mind that a low time on site average is not perceived as negative. For example, if the average time on site is only 55 seconds, then your visitors could be landing on the appropriate page or finding exactly what they are looking for without having to navigate further.

**Average Pageview:** this is one of the most used key performance indicators as it is a quick understanding of website engagement. This is a ratio of the number of pageviews the average web visitor views per session—it is a ratio and not a metric. So, compare average pageviews between segments or different groups of people visiting your site, varying time frames, and across multiple sites or sub-domains (different sub-sites of your main site).

**Funnel Visualization:** funnels are custom paths that you want the visitors to take before they reach your designated goal (see Rule 20, "Convert Your Visitors"). This can be used for both e-commerce and lead generation websites. If your shopping cart abandonment rates are high, you can see what page visitors are most likely to drop off before making a transaction. Funnels allow you to take action by making adjustments to the page with the high drop off rate so that visitors are more likely to continue with their purchase.

You don't necessarily need experienced professionals to identify behavior patterns. Simply utilizing the above KPIs will help you identify and understand visitor behavior, which will, in turn, assist you in improving your website's overall performance.
Rule 12

Practice Kaizen

Web analytics, according to the infinite number of sources on the World Wide Web, is believed to do everything you want and more. So, you invest in Google Analytics and wait for it to work its magic. You wait and wait. However, you must realize that enabling Google Analytics is just the beginning. You can't stop at the installation and leave it at that.

Truth is, Google Analytics is a never-ending practice. You can be flying high in April and then be shot down in May. That's the nature of the website traffic. In order to cope with the inconsistencies and the highs and lows that go with it, practice what the Japanese call "kaizen," or continuous improvement.

To continually improve the performance of your website, use the following criteria to practice kaizen.

- **Data consistency and quality:** always make sure the data is accurate and consistent. Your goal is to compare apples with apples, not apples with oranges. The best way to compare data is using ratios. An example would be the conversion rate or click through rate of one marketing campaign against the conversion rate of another marketing campaign. Another example would be comparing the cost per action of two marketing initiatives.

- **Flexibility:** you have to deal with the reporting needs of various stakeholders, from global management to local/national marketers in a dynamic context where various content and technologies
coexist. Google Analytics can assist by allowing you to set up various reports for each stakeholder based on their needs (see Rule 39, "Share Your Data").

- **Organization and integration:** web analytics is a process you need to integrate into your organization AND your technical infrastructure. You need to define roles and responsibilities. You need to have methodologies. You need resources. Google Analytics can help by allowing you to grant "user" access or "administrative" access to others who may have an interest or can contribute to the success of your website.

- **Education and communication:** learn how to use the data, how to interpret it, and how to make it actionable. Not all websites are alike. You need to stick to it and give it time. Let everyone in the loop know the value of using Google Analytics and how kaizen practices are the way to go. Spread insights, knowledge, and data across departments, hierarchies, and the whole company. Otherwise, all those state-of-art detailed reports that Google Analytics generates will only end up in the shredder, destroying any possible incremental value to your business.

Continuous improvement. Continuous updates. Kaizen. It's what will make Google Analytics work for you. What use are those reports and data when no one has a clue about what to do with them?

Continuous improvement is not rocket science. With Google Analytics, and of course, patience, perseverance and kaizen, you will stop saying, "50 percent of our Marketing worked, we just aren't sure which 50 percent it was."
Rule 13

Use Your Intelligence

Google Analytics has gotten a lot smarter over the years. You can even go as far as saying they are more intelligent now, now that they have added an "Intelligence" feature. This feature acts as a virtual assistant by monitoring key information in your account and then alerting you to any irregular activity. For example, if your bounce rate suddenly jumps over the course of a week, then Google Analytics Intelligence creates an alert notifying you (daily, weekly, or monthly) via email or to your mobile phone via text message.

It also works with your AdWords account as long as the two are linked (see Rule 27, "Link AdWords with Analytics").

When you create a custom alert, you must input your parameters. You can also configure the settings that can apply to multiple profiles and include other email addresses.
Google Analytics has added an insurance policy with its automatic alerts. Google Analytics Intelligence has already gone through your data and automatically posted alerts. How many and the type of alerts depends on your sensitivity to being alerted. A low sensitivity lets you view just the most significant reports, like dramatic changes in traffic. High sensitivity shows you all alerts created. It's up to you to set the scale based on your own preferences.

Intelligence is a great feature for understanding the following:

- Seasonality for specific products or categories over a period of time
- Percentage of organic or paid search results (if the number spikes or decreases) versus the average
- Impact of social media and whether traffic pattern increases due to your social marketing efforts
- Changes in conversion rates to your shopping cart or goals in order to take corrective action

It is comforting to know that Google Analytics Intelligence is constantly monitoring website behavior and noting and alerting significant changes. If something out of the ordinary happens (and trust me, something significant will eventually happen), you will be the first to know. Now that is intelligent!
Rule 14

Benchmark Your Data

You may elect to share your Google Analytics data with other Google products, and Google will use the data to improve the products and services they provide you. Electing to share your data “anonymously with Google and others” allows you to use benchmarking. To provide benchmarking, Google removes all identifiable information about your website, then combines the data with hundreds of other anonymous sites in comparable industries and reports them in an aggregate form.

Please note that if you select “do not share my Google Analytics data,” you will not be able to use the benchmarking feature.

How Does Benchmarking Work?

Benchmarking is a reporting mechanism that tells you where your site stands among the competition. Google Analytics is used by millions of websites. As such it has access to a lot of information traffic, visitors, average time visitors spend on a site, etc. Google buckets this information based on criteria, such as countries and verticals. It uses this information to rank the sites in each of these buckets. For example, Google can rank the sites by US visitor count in the technology vertical. You see a number of charts from sites of comparable traffic, so that you can find out if your visitors stay longer on pages than average, or if they visit more pages than average.
Information about where your website stands in terms of quantity and quality of traffic in comparison to your competition is vital to monetizing the traffic the website receives. It is about knowing where you stand in your industry and helps you identify the variance between average and good.

Remember, Google does not reveal any specific data about your website. Rather, it exposes your relative standing within your vertical. This is very different from other websites that release rankings of sites based on traffic volumes.

**Why Is Benchmarking Useful?**

There are primarily two broad uses to benchmarking: it helps website owners increase the value of the site and also helps them pitch the site to advertisers. Consider an example of a camera review site. If the benchmarking report says that the site ranks above benchmark with visits in its industry vertical but below the benchmark for pages per visit, then there is an opportunity to investigate further.

If you are interested in advertising and pitching to high-value advertisers, you can especially use the benchmarking report to your advantage if you have the high traffic volume compared to the benchmark in your industry.

Recently, Google removed the benchmarking report from the Google Analytics interface. They are now providing benchmarking data as an expanded report that will be emailed directly to Google Analytics users that are opted-in to anonymous data sharing. According to Google, the benchmarking report will include broader trends, such as geographic and traffic source differences in visitor engagement.

You may not want to utilize the benchmarking numbers on a regular basis given that it does not compare your traffic against direct competitors. Rather, you may find it interesting and even inspirational to know how you stack up against other websites in your niche.

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Choose Keywords Wisely

All year long, without pause, Google is on a hunt to collect the data we need to in order to run a successful website. All that this high-powered engine requires is a few well-chosen words, or keywords, to produce results in nanoseconds. That's all there is to it. Or is it? It is actually the relevance of the keyword that draws in the qualified traffic to your website from the search engines. So in order to lure this highly qualified traffic, you need to develop an understanding of how to select the most effective keywords.

The task of choosing keywords can be very cumbersome given the infinite number of possibilities to choose from. Choosing the wrong keywords can be disastrous and set you back months while you are ramping up your search engine marketing efforts.

Below are a few considerations for choosing keywords that can help bring the most relevant, qualified traffic to your website:

• Say no to single words by using phrases or "long tail" keywords (a keyword phrase that has at least three words in the phrase). For example, choosing the keyword phrase "men's running shoes" will draw qualified traffic versus the singular keyword "shoes"
• Target highly searched terms that have as little competition as possible. However, do not use keywords that have less competition just for this reason alone.
Note that you can retrieve competition data by using Google's Keyword Tool (https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal).

- Choose keywords that are specific with a narrow focus, but avoid getting too specific so as to not lose traffic. For example, "Nike men's running shoes" might be specific enough versus something narrower like "Nike Air Pegasus men's running shoes".
- Localize your keywords by making use of your geographical location. For example, "shoe store in San Francisco" might yield better results by attracting local traffic to your website or storefront.

Of course, you may be tempted to focus your energy on the keywords that are driving the most traffic to your website. That's where Google Analytics comes into play. Take a look at a keywords report and see what is happening after a visitor arrives to your website. Your focus should shift to keywords that assist in achieving your website goals versus those with higher volumes that yield less revenue.

![Figure 3: Google Analytics displays what keywords visitors are using and which ones are converting](image)

Furthermore, the average per visit value, or the value of a visit calculated as revenue divided by visits, may be a better indicator of keyword value as opposed to just total revenue. In looking at Figure 3, we can see that the search term "tent" (keyword 8) actually translated into a higher average per visit value at $4.28 compared to other keyword terms in the sample set including a similar keyword in "tents" (keyword 2), which yielded only $1.45 per visit value.

Regardless of how much traffic you get per month for a search term, even if you are generating very few visitors, the fact that you can drive a high conversion rate or a high per visit value from a keyword may suggest that it is a keeper! And while there are hundreds of ways to begin the keyword selection process, your best bet will be with Google Analytics.
Rule 16

Do the Two-Step with Your Content

Let's get right to the point: website content is the heart and soul of your website's success. The content you write can be informational, commercial, or a current event. Its purpose can be for entertainment, marketing, research, specific industries, online advertising, or search engines. It can be objective or subjective. Whatever the case, effectively using your content is a two-step process.

If you have ever taken dance lessons then you know that particular dances have several steps. For the uncoordinated amongst us, like myself, memorizing dance steps can be a difficult task. The dance number known as content is a mere two-step: leverage the content and measure it for success.

Leverage the Content

It is no longer a secret that search engines like content and feed off it to determine rankings. And it's not just content that gets search engines excited about crawling a site, it's "fresh" content that keeps the robots coming back for more. With the advent of "real-time content" in search listings, search engines (Google in particular) will seek out the best and most useful content on the Internet for any given keyword query. Updating your website content and blogging regularly will not only help fulfill the appetites of hungry search engines but also increase your chance of higher rankings and more traffic as a result.
Measure the Content for Success

Using Google Analytics, you can analyze the traffic that is reading unique, fresh, and relevant content and, as a result, moving seamlessly throughout your site. Below are a few reports that you can utilize in Google Analytics to interpret the flow of traffic.

Top Landing Pages

This report allows you to view the most popular pages that visitors first landed on. Compare your landing pages over time and check for consistencies and fluctuations. Give pages with strong content, but little traffic, more life with promotion on social media.

Navigation Summary

This report provides information on how visitors found your content and what page they went to next. Every time visitors click on a link within the copy and navigate to multiple pages they are giving you information about their content choices. Leverage this information in order to gain insight on visitor behavior. (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4: The Navigation Summary Report illustrates the flow of traffic from one page to the next

Entrance Paths/Keywords/Sources

These reports show the path, keywords, and sources visitors used to get to your content, what pages they viewed next, and the page they eventually ended on. If you add content frequently, then you should analyze the variation of keywords that are driving traffic.

Levering your content and then measuring it work in tandem. The results might be surprising and lead to better educated choices, such as the topics you choose to post.
Part III
Reporting: How to Get the Information You Need

The content in this section is intended to help you apply best practices in order to get the most accurate and precise information out of Google Analytics. Everything from filtering to tagging is included so that you can focus on what is important.

- Rule 17: Customize Your Dashboard
- Rule 18: Decide on Your Goal Type
- Rule 19: Measure Dollars, Not Design
- Rule 20: Convert Your Visitors
- Rule 21: Use Filters
- Rule 22: Tag Your URLs
- Rule 23: Differentiate Your Search Efforts
- Rule 24: Measure Page Value, Not Volume
- Rule 25: Measure Referring Traffic
- Rule 26: Monitor Your Social Media Efforts
Part III: Reporting: How to Get the Information You Need

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Rule

17

Customize Your Dashboard

Similar to the dashboard of your car, Google Analytics gives you an overview of how your website is performing (see Rule 3, "Learn to Read...the Data, That Is") when running. Like the "check engine" light on your car dashboard, the Google Analytics dashboard can provide you with enough data to alert you when something doesn't look right. It probably won't give you everything you need to know to fix it, but it will alert you that something needs attention.

The Google Analytics dashboard is completely customizable for each profile you have in your Google Analytics account. You can add, remove, and reorganize any analytics module (a maximum of 12) for your website. Adding is as simple as hitting the "Add to Dashboard" button at the top of any report. Reorganizing the dashboard is as simple as dragging and dropping boxes into positions you prefer.

To make the most out of your dashboard, there are a few modules you should include as standard features on your dashboard. These items help you keep an eye on the leading indicators.

Content Overview

This module allows you to see what pages have the most pageviews. It's a great way to figure out which high-impact pages you should start testing and optimizing. As an alternative, you can add the "Top Content" module, which shows the most popular specific pages versus the content overview module.
Traffic Sources Overview
This module provides an overview of how much traffic you are receiving from direct traffic, search engines, and referring sites. The data is presented as a pie chart in order to visually see what is driving the trends.

Referring Sites
A subset of the Traffic Sources Overview, Referring Sites on the dashboard allows you to scan what external sites are generating, or "referring," the most traffic outside of search engines. This is especially helpful for tracking when your site is mentioned elsewhere on the web, like on blogs, social media sites, and directories.

Campaigns
A subset of the Traffic Sources Overview module, this particular module will report results from campaigns that you explicitly control, tagged with Urchin Traffic Monitor (UTM) tracking (see Rule 22, "Tag your URLs") and allow you to quickly determine the effectiveness of each.

Keywords
This module shows a list of the top five keywords that drive traffic. As a segment, you can also add the search engine associated with each keyword. You can also create two specific modules that displays paid search related keywords and organic search related keywords.

New versus Returning
This module displays the top five countries that are sending traffic to your website, the type of visitor coming from each country, and the number of visits.

There are hundreds of variations of modules that you can add to a dashboard. Again, what is important is that the dashboard is customized with key metrics so that you can easily flag data points that need further investigating. Just like on your car, this is something you do not want to ignore.
Rule 18

Decide on Your Goal Type

We create goals (in Analytics) because they have to be achieved. It does not matter how long they take because they serve us. The higher we set them, the higher we will go.

- Marina Quilez, Google Analytics Professional

Enabling a goal in order to track a conversion (see Rule 8, "Identify Conversions") is one of the best ways to assess how well your site meets its business objectives. The hardest task for most website owners always seems to be identifying what goal type to use. A goal can be any activity on your website that's important to the success of your business or that drives a certain type of behavior that is important to your business. An account signup or requests for a sales call are two examples of a goal. Goals are useful if you would like to understand how much time visitors stay or, more importantly, do not stay on a specific section of your website.

Every website should have at least one goal, especially now since Google Analytics allows for up to 20. The following are different goal types available to choose from. Remember, select goals that help you achieve your defined business objectives.

Time-Based Goals

Time-based goals can be set if you would like to measure a specific amount of time a visitor has spent on your website. You are simply telling Google Analytics the hours, minutes, and seconds that you would like a visitor to spend on your site before a goal is counted. You can even track a time-based goal if a visitor does not reach

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www.google.com/support/analyt-ics/bin/answer.py?answer=55515.
a certain period of time on your website. For example, you would use this goal if you added a video to your website and want to measure how long visitors stay as a result of adding the video.

**Pageview Based Goals**

This is similar to time-based goals except you are tracking goals when a visitor exceeds (or doesn't exceed) a certain number of pages. The same conditions apply as time-based goals, meaning you are telling Google Analytics the number of pageviews you would like to set up as a goal for each visitor. You could use this goal if you have a number of pages on your website (such as an e-commerce website) and want to establish a goal for the number of pageviews visitors reach with each visit.

**URL Destination Goals**

Identifying a specific URL destination has always been the traditional method of tracking goals in Google Analytics. To define a goal in Google Analytics, you specify the page that visitors see once they have completed the activity. For example, if you have a shopping cart on your website, then you would set the "Thank You" or confirmation page as the URL destination goal.

You can also assign a value to a goal in order to evaluate how often visitors become customers after reaching a goal on your website. For example, if you close 10 percent of the people who request to be contacted, and your average transaction is $500, you might assign $50 (i.e. 10 percent of $500) to your "Contact Me" goal. Or, if only five percent of mailing list signups result in a sale, you might only assign $25 to your "email signup" goal.

Setting goals is not a difficult process but it needs to be a thoughtful process. Keep the points below in mind and you will be on your way to successful tracking.

- Consider organizing goals by function (i.e. by time, download, etc.)
- A visitor can only convert each goal once per visit
- Consider consolidating all your goals into one profile
- Creating new goals will not modify your historical data, only future data
Rule 19

Measure Dollars, Not Design

A set definite objective must be established if we are to accomplish anything in a big way.
- John Macdonald, First Prime Minister of Canada

Despite the advances in web technology, availability of free, open source platforms, and all the social media buzz, the primary focus for website owners still appears to be on web design. True. Web design is important, especially when it comes to branding. However, if the design doesn't translate into dollars, then it isn't worth it.

Truth be told, the success of any website will depend on more than just design. Having a website isn't good enough anymore. If a business is spending money on a website then there must be some level of return on investment. There is no cookie cutter approach for this one. But, there are guidelines for establishing goals to measure the return on investment of your website.

Identify Your Objectives

Before you even start the design and development of your website, ask yourself what you want to accomplish for yourself and your visitors. For example, visitors want to be able to find information on your site quickly and easily, as mentioned in Rule 16, "Do the Two-Step with Your Content". That would equate to more pageviews and more time spent on site.

Also, describe what you want to accomplish with clarity and detail. If your goal is to provide information to the public or generate product brand awareness, write down exactly how you are going to provide information or generate product awareness. State exactly how and when you would evaluate your progress.
Make Them Obtainable

Break your website goal(s) into smaller, obtainable goals. For example, if you sell multiple products organized into multiple categories, then establish a goal for each category or each product web page. This will help identify areas of strengths and weaknesses on your way to evaluating your overall website goal.

Establish goals you know you are actually capable of obtaining. If the goal is to generate new leads, but you get very little site traffic, then set your sights low. Be realistic. It's better to reach your goal, regardless of how small, than to not reach it at all. This will allow you to better determine what works or doesn't work.

Make Them Time-Sensitive

Set goals by time and/or importance into specified target dates. For example, if you are trying to sell products for the holiday season or communicating the latest product or service information to customers, then make sure you note your start and completion dates. If your goal is to obtain new website visitors and customers, then your site should be centered on the relevant keywords that new customers would use to search for your site (see Rule 15, "Choose Keywords Wisely").

Whether it's increasing traffic, converting customers, or just simply sharing information, having clear, established goals and objectives will keep you focused and on the right path. And conversely, prevent you from performing unnecessary analysis. It will also help you better understand your website's successes and failures and allow you to fix and improve your website. Otherwise, you will never be satisfied with the results regardless of the design.
Rule 20

Convert Your Visitors

To convert somebody, go and take them by the hand and guide them.
- St. Thomas Aquinas, Scholastic Philosopher and Theologian, 1225-1274

A conversion funnel is a schematic representation of the different web pages in relation to the number of visitors each of these pages received. It visually displays the path taken by visitors navigating from the starting point (i.e. home page) to the ending point (i.e. conversion or goal page). It also shows visitor count at each page and the percentage of visitors who proceeded to the next step in the process.

Setting up a conversion funnel requires you to specify the various paths you would like to track as part of the URL Destination goal (see Rule 18, “Decide on Your Goal Type”). Google Analytics will then record the number of visitors on all the pages in each of these paths. The report generated will give a clear picture about the pages that help in conversion and the pages that have high abandonment rates.

Whenever the quality of a page falls, the bounce rate increases, and the website loses its visitor count. This is especially important for commercial sites that sell goods and/or services. Losing visitors before they convert means lost revenue.
Consider Coleman.com, the website referenced in Figure 5. Coleman's website compares the features and prices for various categories and products. Ideally, the visitor will research the product of their interest, add one or multiple items to Coleman's shopping cart and then proceed toward securing the purchase. However, if there are too many steps in the check out process then the visitor will likely abandon, resulting in lost revenue.

Setting up a Google Analytics conversion funnel will help you identify the following:

- What causes visitors to abandon your conversion funnel
- Which behaviors lead to successful conversions
- Which web pages are negatively impacting the conversion process
- Where visitors go when they leave the funnel

Understanding conversion roadblocks via the funneling process will help you gain targeted insights into your visitors' conversion process and allow you to make the necessary corrections to avoid traffic loss and, more importantly, cart abandonment.
Rule 21

Use Filters

The past is not simply the past, but a prism through which the subject filters his own changing self-image.
- Doris Kearns Goodwin, Pulitzer Prize-winning American Biographer and Historian

Most analytics applications (Google included) generate more information than can be easily processed or understood by the human mind. Few people realize that data that is not analyzed is data that is useless. The question becomes, how do we decipher all that data without missing anything? The quick and dirty answer is: filters. Filters allow you to modify data and customize reports so you can get the information you want in a useful, meaningful way. You can set up an infinite amount of filters.

So where do you begin? Well, before you create a filter in Google Analytics you want to first define the parameters and goal of the filter. Below are three examples of common filters that you can apply right away.

**Lowercase/Uppercase**

Lowercase and Uppercase filters are very useful for consolidating line items in a report. For example, if your reports contain multiple entries for a keyword or a URL, and the only difference between those entries is that the URL or keyword appears with a different combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, the Lowercase and Uppercase filters will consolidate these multiple entries into a single entry for easier data interpretation.
Exclude/Include

When you set up an Exclude filter, if the pattern matches, then the data is thrown away, or excluded from the report. Conversely, when you set up an Include filter, if the pattern matches, then the data is included in the report. An example of an Exclude filter would be to filter out all internal traffic by IP address to increase visitor traffic accuracy, meaning any visits by the website owner would be excluded from the report. An example of an Include filter would be to filter in traffic from a particular state or country.

Search and Replace

This "custom" filter can keep you sane when reading reports as the filter replaces category ID numbers and long URL strings with descriptive words that are easier to identify. A good example would be if you have a URL string containing http://www.domain.com/category.asp?catid=5. The Search and Replace filter will change this URL to something more recognizable, like the actual category name. So, the unrecognizable URL in Analytics "/category.asp?catid=5" would become "/cameras".

Below are a few important notes about filtering:

1. There are two types of filters in Google Analytics: pre-defined and custom.
2. Filters are executed sequentially in the order they are listed and may cancel each other out if not ordered properly.
3. Applying a filter to a profile only works with data going forward and will not apply to data already recorded in your Google Analytics profile.
4. You may need to use regular expressions\(^3\) to create a filter pattern.\(^4\)
5. You can apply a filter to a single profile or multiple profiles.

Knowing that filters are available, and applying one or multiple, will immediately pay dividends in terms of organizing and enhancing your data. It will also simplify the decision making process, improve your Google Analytics reading over time, and prevent you from pulling your hair out!

\(^3\) See glossary in Appendix A for definition.
\(^4\) "What are regular expressions?" Analytics Help, last updated March 8, 2008, http://www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?answer=55582
Tag Your URLs

Tracking, tracking, tracking, and more tracking. I can't say it enough. Tracking means knowing where your visitors came from so you know what is driving specific actions. This allows you to make better decisions and ultimately provide a better site experience to your visitors.

Tracking also means tagging your destination URLs in order to better understand the behavior of specific marketing campaigns. With Google Analytics, there are five such variables you can use when tagging URLs:

1. **Source**: use this to identify a search engine, newsletter name, or other source—the source of traffic or referral
2. **Medium**: use this to identify the type of medium, such as email, banner, or cost per click—the vehicle that communicated the message
3. **Campaign**: use this to identify a specific product promotion or strategic campaign
4. **Term**: use this to identify paid keywords
5. **Content**: use this to differentiate ads or links that point to the same URL within the same medium

Regardless of whether you are running display banners, email campaigns, or affiliate marketing, Google Analytics will allow you to properly identify, manage, and understand visitors who come from various multi-channel campaigns using their URL Builder tool (Figure 6).

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*This search for what you want is like tracking something that doesn't want to be tracked. It takes time to get a dance right, to create something memorable.*

- Fred Astaire, Actor
Rule 22: Tag Your URLs

Figure 6: Google’s URL builder is a simple three-step process that will produce a URL that Google Analytics can track

Stick to these best practices when tagging your advertising campaigns:

- Use consistent names and spellings for all your campaign values so that they are recorded consistently within your Google Analytics reports.
- Use only the campaign variables you need—you should always use source, medium, and campaign name, but term and content are optional.

If your Google Analytics account has been properly linked to your AdWords account (see Rule 27, “Link AdWords with Analytics”), you don’t need to worry about tagging—Google Analytics will do it automatically! The beauty about tagging URLs is that it will allow you to measure which campaign was the most beneficial in terms of clicks, conversions, or revenue. Without this vital information, it will be hard to effectively measure the performance of each.

   http://bit.ly/7dJR
   www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=55578.
Rule 23

Differentiate Your Search Efforts

Google Analytics has a huge appetite for data. Among its most favorite is search engine traffic. This bodes well for Google Analytic's users as most websites generate most of their traffic from search engines. Google Analytics goes as far as breaking down search engine traffic into two buckets: paid search and organic search.

Paid search, also known as sponsored search, pay per click, or cost per click, is traffic that originated from a sponsored listing that was paid for by the advertiser. Sponsored listings can be found in search engines (i.e. Google, Yahoo!, or Bing), websites that sell advertising space (i.e. WebMD.com), or social media sites like Facebook.

Organic search, also known as natural search or non-paid search, is traffic derived from natural listings found only in search engines. The cost is free when someone clicks on your listing in natural search results.

How Much Traffic and Revenue Are Search Engines Generating?

The "Search Engines" report (found under the "Traffic Sources Overview") provides data for both "non-paid" (organic) search and "paid" search. Clicking on "total" will display traffic for both organic and paid search. It is important to note that your paid search traffic will not

6. See glossary in Appendix A for specific definitions.
appear in Google Analytics if you do not properly tag your Destination URLs (see Rule 22, “Tag your URLs”) nor enable the “Auto Tagging” feature in AdWords.

**What Keywords Are Generating Revenue?**

The "Keywords" report (found under the "Traffic Sources Overview") in Google Analytics will show the amount of traffic initiated by visitors who queried specific keyword phrases. It shows what keywords generated the most inbound traffic and highest revenue. For example, you may find that the broad keyword “cheap cameras” generated more traffic compared to the more specific keyword phrase “cheap cameras for sale”. However, the more specific phrase may have generated more sales and yielded a higher return on investment.

**Why Measure Paid Search Traffic against Organic Traffic?**

Measuring paid traffic can help you determine the overall performance of your campaigns and keywords and whether you should invest more. Because you are paying per click for your paid search efforts, you want to make sure that your investment is justified.

You can also compare the quality of traffic between the two. Pre-defined search terms, specific keyword bids, ad copy and a specified landing page can influence the quality of paid traffic. Suppose you are selling products online. You would surely want to know whether your paid and/or organic search is a revenue model or a loss model. This can be accomplished by using goals (see Rule 18, “Decide on Your Goal Type”) so you can compare how many visitors converted from paid search traffic versus how many people converted from organic traffic.

Organic and paid search each has its own advantages. Paid search is a short term or a seasonal strategy: it’s a quick way to drive traffic from search engines. Organic search is a longer-term strategy, given the process, but the benefits of gaining organic search traffic are literally priceless. Regardless of which route you take the important part is to know how leverage the data in Google Analytics.
Rule 24

Measure Page Value, Not Volume

Most organizations, it seems, still put a lot of emphasis on measuring website performance in terms of volume. The focus is always on the total number of visits or pageviews. These “volume metrics” can be misleading. Yes, low traffic and low conversion numbers indicate that something is wrong with your website, but they do not tell the complete story.

Focus your efforts on attracting and converting your most valuable visitors and pages. That means identifying which visits and conversions are of high value. In other words, which visitors are the most profitable to acquire.

In Google Analytics, identifying high value is best seen in the "$ Index" value, or the average value of a page a user visited prior to landing on the goal page or completing an e-commerce transaction. The calculation for $ Index assigns the highest values to pages that are frequently viewed prior to high value conversions or transactions. In contrast, pages that aren't viewed prior to conversions or transactions will have the lowest $ Index values.

To calculate the $ Index for a page you would take the sum of the e-commerce revenue and goal value and divide by the number of unique pageviews for a given page per session prior to the conversion or transaction. Remember, unique pageviews means that a page is only counted once per visit, even if a person views the page multiple times before converting. In addition, only pageviews that precede the conversion or transaction is counted.

*If you cannot measure it you cannot control it.*
- John Grebe, American Chemist (1900-1984)
For example, let's say that there were four unique pageviews to your products page and two visits resulted in $100 in revenue. You also assigned a goal value of $20 to the products page. The $ Index value for your products page would be $55:

\[
\text{E-commerce Revenue ($200) + Total Goal Value ($20)} \\
\text{Number of Unique Pageviews for Products Page (4)} \\
= $55 \text{ Index Value for Products Page}
\]

It just so happened that the two unique visitors who purchased also visited your "about us" page prior to purchasing. So, the $ Index value for your "about us" page, with a goal value of $20, would be $110 ($220 divided by two unique pageviews). Having the $ Index, for this example, is useful as a point of comparison or a ranking metric, not as a stand-alone number. It’s designed to help you identify the pages on your site that are most valuable so you can put more emphasis into those pages that help convert, or pay more attention to those pages that are not assisting in the conversion process.

If you are not tracking e-commerce revenue in Google Analytics and you have not assigned values to your goals (see Rule 9, "Assign Monetary Values"), all of your $ Index values will be zero. The last time I checked, zero data added no value whatsoever, regardless of what level of reporting you are viewing. So what are you waiting for? Start calculating the value of your web pages!
Rule 25

Measure Referring Traffic

Have you ever considered where your visitors are coming from if they are not coming from the search engines? Probably the most overlooked area in Google Analytics is the Referrals section. Obtaining knowledge of “referring sites” is hugely beneficial especially given the advent and popularity of social media.

Truth be told, social networking is now a key channel for most online marketers. Not just because it creates an innovative marketing strategy or presents new business opportunities. Rather, social networks are such a major source of traffic for most websites that it is rivaling that of search engine traffic.

Looking at the referring traffic sources reports will reveal the website or social network your visitors came from prior to visiting your website. This can be extremely useful if you are running social media campaigns or other forms of advertising (such as banner ads) as it will help measure campaign success.

Leverage Repeat Visitors

Does a visitor make a repeat visit to your site? Like repeat customers, the volume of returning visitors you have are a more reliable indicator of your site’s position, and are a vital part of your marketing strategies. Similarly, the data will reveal your site’s usability, on-page popularity, relevance, quality of content, the proportion of images and their positioning, their contribution to drawing traffic, etc.

A house may draw visitors, but it is the possessor alone that can detain them. - Charles Caleb Colton, English Sportsman and Writer, 1780-1832
Find New Visitors

While loyal visitors are needed, you also need a consistent and regular flow of new, targeted traffic. The Internet is loaded with choices and loyalty is hard to come by. And when the loyalty factor is not working, the flow of new visitors will make up the difference in traffic volume.

Take the social media site, StumbleUpon.com. This site is known for its ability to generate massive amounts of referring traffic to a website that has been "stumbled." Therefore, if you just wrote a great article or created a website which offers creative and useful content then you'll want as many eyeballs on it as possible. Uploading to StumbleUpon.com will give you the opportunity to generate rapid exposure, establish a reader base, and gain numerous backlinks (links from StumbleUpon.com visitors with websites).

Furthermore, if you are active on Facebook and Twitter, two of the more popular social media sites today, then you have a myriad of opportunities to place backlinks that point to your site.

Tracking referrers also gives you insights on several other factors, such as pageviews, time spent on page and site, referring sites, and bounce rate per referring site—all of which are highly useful for giving a qualitative edge to your numbers, again by leveraging the referring source to attract more traffic to your site.

According to the Google Webmaster Central Blog, "you can also understand overall trends in referral traffic volume by viewing your Google Analytics Referring Pages report directly from the links to your website page in Webmaster Tools."

Just remember that analyzing referring traffic is not a one-time investment. Do not spot-check the referring traffic reports when you just launched a campaign. The result can only take you so far. Only a sustained and continual engagement with traffic referrers will yield hidden opportunities.

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Monitor Your Social Media Efforts

Social media first started as a "gamey" kind of thing and was not taken very seriously by businesses. All that has changed. Social media, which is comprised of social networking (i.e. Facebook, MySpace), micro-blogging (i.e. Twitter), blogging, widgets, article submissions, and other forms of user-generated content, quickly became a platform for marketing and public relations.

Internationally known brands and products now embrace it to sell those would-be online networkers. Those very same companies started wondering how they would not only monitor social media, but also gauge the results. Unfortunately, gauging the results of social media is not as simple as looking at pageviews. It is much more involved. But fret not, Google Analytics is bridging the gap between what happens with social media and your website. For example, Google Analytics now has a report that shows you the value the Google +1 button (or Facebook "likes" and Twitter "follows") adds to your site traffic.

- **Social Engagement**—this report allows you to see site behavior for those that are "socially engaged" and are "not socially engaged" (visitors who do and don't interact socially on your website). These are visits that include clicks on +1 buttons or other social interaction buttons like Facebook "likes." Viewing this report, for example, will allow you to compare traffic

behavior (time on site, pageviews, etc.) from those who +1 your page versus those who do not during a visit.

- **Social Actions**—this report lets you review the source and action (i.e. +1 clicks, follows, likes, shares, etc.) performed by a socially engaged visitor. You will be able to break down this report by looking at metrics like Unique Social Actions and Actions per Social Visit to help you analyze on-site performance by socially engaged visitors.

- **Social Pages**—this report allows you to compare the pages that have social actions. Since each social action is tied to a specific page, you can use this data to assign additional page value (see Rule 24, "Measure Page Value, Not Volume") for those pages that have a high number of social interactions, or focus on those pages that do not have a lot of social interactions.

Measuring social media in Google Analytics alone may not tell the whole story because the referrals from social media may compare unfavorably with a pay per click campaign. Besides, in social media, the action is elsewhere and may not be reflected in your website’s performance. Also, social media is more about perception, engagement, and emotions, and less about numbers. This is why it is referred to as “monitoring social media” instead of “measuring social media” in Google Analytics.

Applying a filter is a good way to monitor your social media efforts (see Rule 21, ”Use Filters”). This will allow you to compare visits from social media next to other mediums, such as paid search or email. Filtering allows for a quick comparison rather than having to drill down into each referrer.

There are many social media monitoring tools that tell us to what extent social media is informally providing the "touch and feel" of the product or brand you are pushing through to a larger audience. Tools like Radian6 (http://www.Radian6.com), for example, give you insights into your brand’s performance on various social media channels, blogs, etc. with the help of detailed Google Analytics reports and charts that measure behavioral statistics and semantics.

Regardless of what social media tool you use, it is apparent that it needs to work in unison with Google Analytics. This means creating a specific profile in Google Analytics for your favorite or most popular social media channel (see Rule 31, "Profile Your Data"). Facebook even goes as far as allowing you to add Google Analytics to your Facebook page!
Part IV
Reading: Specific Action Steps to Help You Optimize the Data

The content in this section is intended to help you take the necessary steps toward optimizing the data found in Google Analytics. The result of the actions outlined in these chapters will help you narrow in on the data that is important to you.

• Rule 27: Link AdWords with Analytics
• Rule 28: Dial into Mobile Traffic
• Rule 29: Track Your Conversions
• Rule 30: Segment Your Audience
• Rule 31: Profile Your Data
• Rule 32: Measure e-Commerce Data
• Rule 33: Add in Event Tracking
• Rule 34: Practice the Art of Landing Pages
Rule 27

Link AdWords with Analytics

There are couples a matchmaker would match every time and couples who, for no rhyme or reason, rhyme.
- Robert Brault, Freelance Writer

The relationship between Google AdWords and Google Analytics has taken another turn in the search engine soap opera. And, again, it's been for the better. Google, identifying the importance of goals and conversions in both programs, has made it possible to import goals and transactions from Google Analytics into AdWords. This is a significant step forward in the relationship.

In the past, AdWords users would have to click to and from Google Analytics to see which campaigns, ad groups, and keywords were performing on a website. Now, in typical Google fashion, they have made it as easy as 1-2-3 once you link Google AdWords and Analytics together. The result is an abundance of information. Here are a few more examples:

- Using Google Analytics data with other Google products, such as Website Optimizer
- Measuring what AdWords campaigns and keywords are converting into Google Analytics goals
- Reporting e-commerce data at the AdWords campaign and keyword level
- Comparing AdWords performance versus overall website performance
- Analyzing site performance (page views or time on site) for specific keywords
- Evaluating an AdWords campaign, ad group or keyword performance against other campaigns
Importing goals and transactions into AdWords from Google Analytics is arguably one of the biggest benefits. This lets you track campaign ROI and optimize your account for conversions directly inside the AdWords interface. Previously, conversions were something you only measured in AdWords and enabling AdWords conversions required you to install separate tracking code. Now, all you need is to set up a goal in Google Analytics (see Rule 18, "Decide on your Goal Type") and then import those goals from Analytics into AdWords. Once that is done you can use these goals with AdWords features, like Conversion Optimizer, a bidding tool that helps manage campaigns against a pre-determined cost per acquisition.

If you are proficient in setting up profiles (see Rule 31, "Profile Your Data"), then you can even go as far as setting up a specific profile just for Google AdWords and/or other pay per click initiatives such as Bing. I consider setting up a specific profile for Google AdWords a best practice because it allows you to quickly understand the entire picture of visitor behavior generated from sponsored search, without having to take the extra step of segmenting out other data.

You can also link your Webmaster Tools verified site to an Analytics profile when they use the same Google account. Not only will your Analytics profiles be accessible within Webmaster Tools, but you will also be able to take advantage of new features.

Having another doorway into Google Analytics will offer a golden opportunity to look at more of your website traffic. Besides, logging more time in Google Analytics will help build your confidence level and expand your knowledge of your own website. You may also find yourself engaged in recently added mobile reports (see Rule 28, "Dial into Mobile Traffic") and social tracking (see Rule 26, "Monitor Your Social Media Efforts").

What are you waiting for? Take advantage of this ever-growing relationship now that your Google Analytics reporting is just one click away with other Google related products.

Dial into Mobile Traffic

How important have mobile phones become in our daily lives? Ask yourself: Could you live one day without your mobile phone? They have changed our daily habits. The amount of money spent on mobile devices is increasing as some predict that smartphones and tablets are expected to outsell computers in 2011.10 There are also significant increases in mobile application downloads. Text messaging is as popular as ever. In fact, most teens say they can even text message blindfolded.11

The globalization of mobile phones has given way to a number of opportunities in terms of content, ad format, apps, and overall interactivity of non-game applications in order to engage users. In many countries, the Internet is the mobile phone. For mobile marketers, that means opportunities. However, in order for you to better understand these opportunities and improve returns you should start with Google Analytics.

Just as you would with regular web-based traffic, you want to analyze your mobile traffic for trends. Google Analytics provides two reports in the "Mobile" section under "Visitors".

The overview report displays a breakdown of mobile traffic versus non-mobile traffic. The second mobile report, the Devices report, consists of three dimensions: Mobile Device Info, Mobile Device Branding, and Mobile Input Selector.

The Mobile Device dimension displays the actual hardware that a user used to visit your site. The cool feature with this dimension is that you can see a picture of any device by clicking on the camera icon next to any device. Mobile Device Branding provides the brand associated with the phone, such as the manufacturer (Apple) or carrier (Verizon). The Mobile Input Selector will show the primary input method for the device, such as a touch screen, click wheel, or stylus.

Given the amount of specific data Google Analytics provides, you may find traffic and revenue results to be quite interesting. For example, the iPad may be generating more revenue than the iPhone or even a PC/laptop. This is highly actionable in that you can optimize your site for the iPad and set up cross-promotional opportunities or create coupons.

You can even measure how Google AdWords or other pay per click campaigns are performing. If your results, for example, show that your mobile site is experiencing a high bounce rate and a low conversion rate, then like your web-based performance, you may want to review your landing page or ads.

There is more you can do to further analyze your mobile traffic including:

- Creating an advanced segment to align with the metrics that are relative to your business
- Setting up a separate profile (see Rule 31, "Profile your Data")
- Segmenting by medium or campaign (see Rule 30, "Segment your Audience")
- Scheduling an auto report to be sent to your email inbox daily, weekly, or monthly
- Generating a custom alert that is emailed to you when specific thresholds are met (see Rule 13, "Use Your Intelligence")

Whereas the web's ROI has proved rewarding, the possibilities in mobile have yet to be discovered. Knowing that more mobile users are surfing the web, taking part in social networks, and shopping should pique your interest. It is not too early to start taking the mobile market seriously, especially knowing that your data is just a few Google Analytics metrics away.
There is little argument that measuring online advertising is easier and more accurate than traditional modes, such as radio and television. With the availability of web analytics, you, the advertiser, are privy to data related to your advertising efforts. For example, if you are advertising on Google, the AdWords interface will provide the number of ad views (i.e. impressions) and ad clicks, as well as a number of other metrics.

If you are not using Google Analytics goals to track conversions (see Rule 27, "Link AdWords with Analytics"), you have the AdWords conversion tracking feature as an alternative option. AdWords conversion tracking will allow you to categorize different actions by applying labels such as:

- **Purchases/Sales**—for tracking e-commerce related transactions of products or services
- **Leads**—for tracking how many users requested follow-up calls for more information
- **Signups**—for tracking subscriptions or newsletters
- **Views of a Key Page**—for tracking the number of visits to a particular page that you want visitors to view
- **Other**—for tracking a category unique to your service or business

AdWords conversion tracking involves adding tracking code to the appropriate page. Depending on your category/label, that could be the “Thank You” page after a sale or the confirmation page after a lead form is submitted.
In terms of tracking conversions, it's important to note that AdWords uses a 30-day cookie and ignores other marketing channels. In other words, Google AdWords will track a visitor's behavior on your website for a period of 30 days if they originally arrived from a sponsored search. In contrast, Google Analytics measures direct conversions regardless of any other marketing channel, such as banners or organic search. When it comes to tracking AdWords conversions, Analytics will still only credit conversions to AdWords clicks when there are no other traffic sources between the click and the conversion, such as organic search or referral from another site.

![Figure 7: The process of how AdWords conversion tracking works (source: Search Engine Journal)](source: Search Engine Journal)

Tracking conversions will dispel any notion of skepticism you may have when it comes to knowing what marketing channels are converting.
When a visitor arrives at your website, they could play the role of browser, casual visitor, first-time buyer, repeat customer, vendor, or wholesaler among others. Ask yourself how much more insightful it would be if you can further filter these consumer segments. Well, now you can by taking advantage of the advanced segments feature.

First, don’t confuse the segmenting feature with filters. Filters parse out the data before it gets into the reports. For example, excluding internal traffic would be a reason to filter (see Rule 21, “Use Filters”). Segments, on the other hand, are specialized groups of defined customers based on their needs and wants and receive different attention and different levels of marketing. Focusing on referring traffic from social media would be a reason to use segments (see Rule 25, “Measure Referring Traffic”).

Using advanced segments is an excellent way to understand what a specific audience type does on your site. A few examples:

- How frequently visitors from each segment use the search box on your site
- How many new visits versus returning visits came from each segment
- How many visits from each segment came from a specific region, state, or city

Segments can be demographic like city, region, country, or traffic sources like PPC (pay per click) campaign traffic, SEO traffic, email campaign traffic, or a segment where people clicked on a...
banner or landing page on the website. Comparing segments will allow you to easily compare key metrics like traffic and conversion rates from each.

For example, if you are advertising on Google AdWords then you can use the advanced segments feature to compare AdWords campaign traffic against:

- Bing or Yahoo! PPC traffic
- All site traffic
- A specific subset of AdWords traffic

Google Analytics allows you to segment data in different ways using the dimension pull-down menu. So, for example, if you want to see the traffic in your keywords report broken out by city or region then simply select the "city" or "region" option from the dimension pull-down menu. This can have a profound effect on which market you focus on for specific keywords.

Segmenting can be a powerful feature for making better decisions. It will also allow you to focus on marketing campaigns that are performing well or not so well. Bottom line: don’t be in the segmented group that does not look at segments. The result will only leave you vulnerable to averages that can be misleading and prevent you from capitalizing on opportunities.
Rule 31

Profile Your Data

Google has made profiling one of the best kept secrets within Analytics. Google Analytics allows you to create multiple profiles under one account. When you first set up your Google Analytics account, you are, in effect, creating a profile under that account.

The following are some of the reasons and benefits for setting up multiple profiles under one account. You are able to:

- Control the flow of information about your website
- Separate out information about specific web properties, like your blog
- Track multiple independent web properties (i.e. http://www.domain1.com and http://www.domain2.com)
- Determine which data from your site appears in the reports
- Apply different rules and criteria for advanced analysis
- Restrict access for certain individuals
- Segment your visitors
- Set up reporting access for a variety of users
- Create custom reporting
- Track various, specific outcomes with goals
- Obtain information on internal search habits
- Establish a back-up for your main profile

Adding a profile is the easy part. The more challenging task is configuring your profile so that it is pulling in the appropriate data. There are a variety of options to make your account run more efficiently, so make sure you do the following:

In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.
- Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the U.S.
• Specify the Default Page option
• Apply AdWords cost data
• Consider adding the Site Search option
• Set up at least one goal
• Filter your results to set up different properties that will affect your reports
• Add other users whom you want to have access to this profile only

Here are a few other important notes to keep in mind:

• The first profile for a property should be the "master" profile. A master profile should have no filters so that it contains ALL historical data since tracking began. Once this is set up, leave this profile alone!
• Once a profile is deleted, the profile data cannot be recovered (make a back-up of the master profile by clicking on "Add new profile" and selecting "Add a profile from an existing domain").
• Tracking for a profile begins as soon as the tracking code is installed on the website and a visitor's browser loads a page.
• When you add an additional profile from an existing website with its own profile, then the additional profile will not contain the historical data that you see in the first profile.

Setting up profiles rewards your effort with great customer insight. You can then leverage that insight to your advantage by developing better content or redesigning your page flow. The end result will help you market your product/service to your prospect-turned-customer.

So, in the end, for all the negativity that profiling in the "real world" receives, this is one area of your life where profiling actually does some good.
Rule 32

Measure e-Commerce Data

Money is not real. It is a conscious agreement on measuring value.
- John Ralston Saul, Canadian Author

Google Analytics not only tracks your website's data, but also your e-commerce transaction data. You get to know how, why, who, and what governs your customer's behavior to buy your product or service.


After the e-commerce is enabled, you can use Google Analytics to your advantage by running specific reporting related to e-commerce. Below are two examples of the statistics Google Analytics provides.

Traffic Sources (Sorted by Most Revenue Generated)

So, where's the money coming from? From your email campaign? From SEO marketing? PPC advertising? Google Analytics tells you what is working or, more importantly, what is not working by giving you a list of the traffic sources that generate the most revenue (Figure 9).

code.google.com/apis/analytics/docs/track-ing/gaTrackingEcommerce.html
Keywords (Sorted by Most Revenue Generated)

The key to finding your website, from the customer point of view, is all in the keyword (see Rule 15, "Choose Keywords Wisely"). Google Analytics shows you what keyword phrase your visitors used to locate your website’s product or service. Google Analytics then goes on to show you what keyword phrase contributed to a purchase or sale. Having historical data on what keywords converted is a big advantage that will help you convert future customers by allowing you to focus on the same keywords.

Google Analytics does make it possible for you to review the data and analyze it over time so that you are able to make better business decisions. Also, you now have a grip on your online marketing budget—by spending wisely and milking it to extract maximum dollar value.
Rule 33

Add in Event Tracking

There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from.
- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Swiss-American Psychiatrist and Author

The process of establishing website goals begins with identifying and then tracking specific events on your website. Thankfully, Google Analytics gives us the ability to track a wide variety of events, such as clicks on an image or the number of times the play button on a video is clicked.

Event tracking really depends on the specific goals and needs of your site, and what you want to track. So, you need to determine what event it is you need to track. You may want to know how many visitors are clicking on a product image, opting-in for your recurring e-newsletter, or downloading the latest e-newsletter in PDF format. Regardless, you should track some type of event because when a visitor interacts with a video player or game on your website, no pageview is generated, thus making it difficult to measure.

Here are some common tracked events that do not generate pageviews:

- Clicks on links that take the visitor to another site
- Clicks on an image or button (i.e. Facebook icon or "shop now" button)
- Banner ad clicks
- File downloads (i.e. PDF)
- Page widgets
- E-commerce activity/shopping cart purchases
- Member functions (i.e. tracking new member signups, log-ins, etc.)
- Flash, Ajax, and Javascript related content/play button on a video or audio
After you enable the tracking, it is just a matter of viewing the data in Analytics. For example, if you are tracking clicks on the "follow" Twitter icon/link on your website's home page then you can view the data by category, action, or label according to how you set up your event tracking. The "Overview" report under "Events" will show the top events and number of actions for each.

![Event Tracking overview report](image)

**Figure 10:** The Event Tracking overview report shows the top events and number of actions for each

Event tracking is there to help improve your overall online sales and marketing goals and allow you to have a better understanding of your visitors' actions.
Rule 34

Practice the Art of Landing Pages

Good post-click marketing (landing page) should build trust with a step or two of a "conversation" before popping the question, as any good salesperson would.
- Scott Brinker, June 2007, "The Top 5 Best (and Top 5 Worst) Things About Landing Pages"[13]

People scan web pages like they would a book or magazine—from left to right, then diagonally across and down the page, and then finally back up to the top. That leaves precious seconds to grab the visitor’s attention, communicate the purpose, and encourage them to act on your call to action. Sounds difficult, but it's not impossible.

A landing page is a single web page that appears in response to a visitor clicking on an advertisement. The landing page is an extension of the advertisement and is generally used with email campaigns or pay per click campaigns. Landing pages can be more effective than linking to your home page as they generally enhance the effectiveness of the advertisements.

Creating an effective landing page can be a difficult task but not an impossible one. Below are best practices you can apply.

Headline
This should be clear, direct, and an attention grabber. You want to make sure the headline is situated across the top of the page and that it tells visitors what they want to know. It should also contain a keyword to improve your PPC quality score and/or organic search efforts.

Copy
Ideally, the copy on a landing page should be promotion-based with one appealing message while at the same time consistent with the brand message. Not an easy task. It should also be uncluttered with plenty of whitespace. Use bullet points to explain the benefits and include sub-heads to break up the text. Finally, write in plain English and refrain from using jargon.

Design
This is the trickiest of all the landing page elements as most people want to over emphasize design. Remember, a visitor is going to stay on a page for no more than five seconds so keep the design simple by avoiding overbearing colors (i.e. white font on a black background) and sticking with easy to read fonts. Don't be afraid to use images but use them in a way that balances out the copy, helps tell the story, sells the product, and portrays the biggest benefit.

Call to Action
I recommend placing the call to action at the top AND bottom of the page so that it is always visible (assuming not everything on the page is above the fold like it should be). Try to keep the call to action "soft." For example, use "Try it now" versus something stronger like "Buy Now". Remember, a visitor may not be ready to commit to your product or service yet, but are still interested. I also find that buttons tend to be better than text as they stand out more.

Conversions
The purpose of a landing page is to get the visitor to understand the product/service quickly and then have them act on it. The "acting" part can be accomplished by including the following:

- Phone number (preferably a 1-800 number)
- Form submission (limit the required fields)
- Value proposition (white paper, coupon, contest entry)
- Video (this is your best selling tool, it's interactive and will keep the visitor on the page longer)

Of course, all of the above is trackable. You can help the conversion effort by including a trust/security icon and a testimonial or two to provide credibility and give confidence to the visitor.

Finally, testing variations with a different message, image, layout, and/or color to find the right combination will help you improve your conversion rate.
Part V
What Now? What to Do with the Data
Now That You Have It

Okay. You applied all the best practices mentioned in previous chapters. You analyzed all your marketing campaigns and pulled together all the appropriate reports. You feel good about the situation. But this is not quite where it ends. Some may argue this is just the beginning. This section will assist you in taking the next big step into applying Google Analytics beyond the numbers.

• Rule 35: Make a Decision
• Rule 36: Avoid the Dangers of Averaging
• Rule 37: Analyze Trends
• Rule 38: Use the Data to Take Action
• Rule 39: Share Your Data
• Rule 40: View In Page Analytics
• Rule 41: Know Where to Seek Help
Rule 35

Make a Decision

Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide. Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go in. 
- Napoleon Bonaparte

You have Google Analytics. Great start. You run weekly traffic reports on your website. Wonderful. Let's just say you are even crunching the numbers. Okay. But are you making the right decisions as a result? Or are you passing the buck to the so-called “experts” and allowing them to decide for you? More often than not the latter produces nothing but PowerPoint decks and not decisions. Lesson: you decide. And to decide right, you ought to know right.

First, don't get caught up in the geeky, overused jargon. Look at what Google Analytics is revealing and make a decision based what the data is telling you. If you can't quite make heads or tails of what Google Analytics is really trying to say about your website, then try telling a story out of the numbers. For example, "Our website received 100 visitors over seven days and 75 viewed more than five pages. Almost half of those visitors even purchased our product!" Creating a story out of your numbers may actually help simplify the process of trying to make a decision.

Spending as little as an hour or two a month to understand and monitor Google Analytics reports can make a big difference on the bottom line. Focus your attention to the behavior of your most important pages, such as the "contact us" page. If Google Analytics tells you visitors are exiting your home page at a high rate then it may be because the page looks more like a tax return versus a simple form fill. Evaluate the marketing campaigns and determine which ones are
bringing in value and which are draining your budget. Your end goal is to make a decision and act on it.

What you decide now will pay off in real time with long-term results. Speed, however, can be a double-edged sword and one has to be careful in exercising it while making decisions. For example, your Google Analytics reports show that your marketing campaign has not yielded a single conversion in the last four hours. Does that mean you shut down the campaign? The answer is emphatically no. Avoid jumping to conclusions.

Consider various related factors, such as multiple metrics, and dig deeper into the numbers. Metrics are not proxies for performance, and they tend to cast a spell on us. When is the data interesting, and when is it actionable? This needs to be addressed carefully before making decisions on your data. But once you do, decision making will be that much easier.

In theory, applying best practices should empower you to make the decisions with the data. Remember to try to keep it as simple as possible (see Rule 5, "Keep It Simple, Silly"). If it still feels overwhelming, then seek help (see Rule 41, "Know Where to Seek Help").

Remember, web analytics is a developing language and one that is being taught to and learned by a growing population. With the rapid development of e-commerce coupled with the ever-expanding international information exchange and collaboration, the need to understand the data and make decisions becomes more and more essential to being successful on the web.
Rule

36

Avoid the Dangers of Averaging

I abhor averages. I like the individual case. A man may have six meals one day and none the next, making an average of three meals per day, but that is not a good way to live.
- Louis D. Brandeis, United States Supreme Court Justice (1916-1939)

A colleague once told me, "Metrics are not proxies for performance." In other words, avoid getting trapped in the dangers of averaging that can be easy to calculate and convey. I have heeded this advice ever since I heard it.

Averages are guilty of under-leveraging Google Analytics and do not offer fresh insights. And therein lies the problem. Yet, most of us are prone to using averages as a default metric in our analysis. But why do we love averages while number crunching? Perhaps because it is a commonly accepted feed for any metric cycle and it is an easy way to aggregate the numbers or analysis or data.

Here are two scenarios:

1. Average time spent by visitors on your site is 60 seconds. This can be on par with the previous year's results. What does this really tell you? That your site is not slipping up on its performance, popularity, and buzz value. Are you sure?

2. You have segmented the data from Google Analytics (see Rule 30, "Segment your Audience"). And this is what it shows (additionally):
   a. Average time on site (all visitors): 60 seconds
   b. Visitors from social media: 35 seconds
   c. From search engines: 38 seconds
   d. Not from search engines: 75 seconds

Scenario 2 appears to offer more insight. You know the social media and search engine traffic are not staying very long and likely to be
unqualified traffic. You also know where to focus your efforts so that you are able, empowered, and competent to act on this insight. Proof enough that you should not bet all your cards on averages.

When you take the averages route in Analytics, you may be led astray. In some cases, it may not have a strong bearing on your decision making arising out of such analysis. But in quite a few instances, it will perilously give you the wrong outcome.

Most marketing managers involved in various online marketing channels and campaigns will probably want to avoid averages in order to better compare the performance. Besides, your stakeholders and supervisors may not be interested in simple averages, especially when the focus is on revenue or ROI.

Google Analytics tells you that 60 percent of your website's visitors remain for zero to 10 seconds. But nearly 40 percent of your visitors stay for three to 10 minutes! These averages tell you that a majority of your site traffic is exiting very fast. Dig deeper, and with a small directed, focused dose of insight from Google Analytics, you may come to find out that your website is far from underperforming. Find out why the 40 percent of your visitors are interested. The answer will then allow you to invest, leverage, and convert the remaining disinterested 60 percent of your visitors so that you can add significant, tangible value to your site.
Analyze Trends

The key to using Google Analytics is to get important information that will help you measure results. However, reading Google Analytics data is not just absolute traffic numbers. Yes, it gives you a plethora of information, but will it allow you to make decisions or act on the data? Not necessarily.

Segmenting (see Rule 30, "Segment Your Audience") is a nice way to break up the data. But once you have the data you still need to take that next step. That is where trend analysis comes into play.

Traders on the stock market continually apply this method of analysis to predict the future movement of a stock based on past data. The idea behind trend analysis is that what has happened in the past gives you an idea of what will happen in the future.

Naturally, looking at trends is one of the most common activities upon first reviewing data. Google Analytics allows you to accomplish this with its myriad of graphs under each report, which visually display results over a period of time. When you notice a spike, you can drill down, look at the sources individually, and attribute the impact based on an individual graph. Google Analytics also has functionality built in that will allow you to click any of the data plots to quickly gain additional valuable insight. The figure below is an example of how Google Analytics helps visualize trends and comparing one time period against another.
Some of the benefits of trend analysis include:

- Predetermining transactions that are most likely to be fraudulent
- Analyzing common characteristics of a consumer base
- Plotting aggregated response data over time
- Applying data for cost/benefit analysis
- Gauging customer response to changes in business
- Providing early warning indicators of probable issues
- Viewing strategies from a long-term perspective
- Safeguarding against costly errors

There is no doubt that practicing trend analysis will enable you to make analytical decisions about your business and products/services that will help you maximize revenue.
Rule 38

Use the Data to Take Action

Let's face it: every website is faced with a problem (or two). It may be related to an internal process or a customer, or both. As discussed throughout this book, Google Analytics provides you with the intelligence to understand and address the problem. Yet the data can be overwhelming, to say the least. This is especially true if you are a small business owner or new to the business of tracking website visitor behavior.

One look at Google Analytics data and you can come away feeling lost or anxious to get answers. Ah, but therein lies the key: intelligently interpreting, disseminating, and utilizing the data to arrive at conclusions and decisions. Otherwise, the information becomes useless. Here are some suggestions on how to properly use your data.

Invest in the Analysis, Not the Technology

Surround yourself with people, colleagues, friends, and the like who have analytical minds that will be able to interpret, disseminate, and manage the mounds of data. Google Analytics is sufficient for the needs of most businesses so there's no need to fret over the technology. However, you should try to avoid using two analytics programs. Experience has taught me that you get more questions than answers when dealing with multiple sets of data. Not everyone may agree but let's not forget that the primary goal and a better use of your time should be on the analysis and drawing conclusions, not on the technology.
Establish Goals

Ask yourself, "What is the desired result?" or "What am I trying to accomplish?" for a particular web page. Whether it's increasing traffic or converting customers, having clear, established goals and objectives will prevent you from performing unnecessary analysis. It will also keep your website on the right track to achieving its goals. Google Analytics allows you create up to 20 conversion goals per profile. So, there is no excuse for adding such simple goals, such as length of time on site and number of pages per visit.

Test and Tweak, Then Test Some More

Once you establish goals (see Rule 18, "Decide on your Goal Type") it is time to put the data to the test. Literally. Because what do bounce rates really mean if the data is not coupled with the testing of a message, design, layout, or call to action? The results will show how users react to changes. So, if your goal is to decrease the bounce rate, then did the test show the visitor staying on the website longer, or leaving quicker? You want to keep tweaking and testing until you reach the desired result. Without testing, how can you really make a sound, logical decision pertaining to your website? There are no excuses for not testing. Google has a free tool called "Website Optimizer" (http://www.google.com/websiteoptimizer) to achieve the desired test data you seek.

Patience Is a Virtue

It is generally not a good idea to make changes on the basis of a few days worth of data. Before you delete or pause a keyword or ad (either temporarily or permanently), ask yourself if you have "statistical significance" or statistically enough data to make a sound decision. A longer date range translates into statistical significance, which then translates into easier decisions. Shorter time frames offer misleading data, which lead to miscalculated decisions. Take into account returning customers or those who return to your website a second time at a later date to make a purchase. You may miss out on important conversion data if you react too quickly due to a small date range of data. Also, depending on your goal, it may take days or even months for many of your visitors to convert to customers. So, be patient and set a date range that will last as long as your expected sales cycle or that will return statistically significant data.
Rule 39

Share Your Data

Google Analytics is to help you understand how your site is performing so you can optimize it to accomplish your goals. Yet, there are lots of twists and turns to analyzing the data that Google Analytics provides. Understanding visitor behavior, trends in traffic, conversion and e-commerce reporting, and site navigation paths employed by the visitors can be a lot to ask of one person. Why not try sharing the load with others as an effective way for you, the website owner, to truly know if your website is performing at an optimal level?

Who are these "others" I refer to that might find this information useful? Well, for starters, these people are your partners, teammates, colleagues, and subordinates, not to mention the people you report to. Let’s take a look at a short list of recipients of Google Analytics reporting.

You

First and foremost, make sure you are set up to receive reporting on, preferably, a weekly basis. Customizing your Google Analytics dashboard (see Rule 17, "Customize your Dashboard") is a good starter as it contains an overview of everything going on with your website. Besides, the dashboard should be tailored to meet your needs as someone who is responsible for multiple facets of the website.

Often, we are too slow to recognize how much and in what ways we can assist each other through sharing such expertise and knowledge.
- Owen Arthur, 5th Prime Minister of Barbados

42 Rules for Applying Google Analytics
Advertisers

In the context of online advertising, the advertiser has one goal in mind: maximizing ad revenue. Advertisers want to know and have a right to know how their ads are performing on your site. Rightly so, advertisers are particular about the quality of traffic they receive and how much they pay for that traffic. Therefore, sharing pertinent data would add a lot of credibility to the validity of your claims as a website owner. Keep the advertiser informed, and most importantly, provide them with a reason to spend more advertising dollars due to your website's performance.

Search Agencies

A website's worth lies in its visitors: quality and quantity. One of the ways of increasing visitor count is to ensure that the site appears in the top results in a search engine. Agencies that specialize in search engine optimization or pay per click advertising could use the reports to check the effectiveness of their efforts and make the necessary changes to correct any anomalies.

Website Designers/Developers

The aim of a website designer, in the context of a commercial website, is to make the site conversion as “user friendly” as possible. Information collected through conversion funneling reports, for example, could help the website designer pinpoint roadblocks resulting in low or no conversions caused primarily because of poor web design. Access to these reports could help a web designer continuously improve the website design to maximize conversions.

Stakeholders

The expression “There are many ways to skin a cat” in website terms really means that there are many ways to monetize a site. And those with a stake in the website want to know how it is performing monetarily. Details about which campaign or keyword performed well are not necessary at this level. The bottom line is overall site performance, and a high-level overview of e-commerce or conversions will keep your stakeholders informed.

The data that Google Analytics reports is as good as gold and should not be shared without discretion. A non-disclosure agreement might be in order before providing access to that all-important data. However, once you have multiple sets of eyeballs scanning the allotted data plots and providing feedback, then your decision to share the data may prove to be the best decision you've yet made.
Rule 40

View In Page Analytics

Ever notice the video surveillance camera in your neighborhood corner store? Well, Google Analytics has a feature called "In Page Analytics" that behaves in a similar fashion and is immensely valuable as it helps you understand how visitors interact and navigate your site.

In Page Analytics is a nice upgrade to the old "Site Overlay" feature that even Google will admit has not worked as well as it could have. In Page Analytics works as an overlay to a website allowing users to see data superimposed right over different products or design elements. The goal of this feature is to help you better correlate between site elements and traffic metrics, understand how your visitors interact with various pages, and allow you to make educated design and navigation choices.

In Page Analytics is good for determining the effectiveness of your content, navigation, page layout, and call to action.

Equally important, it will also help you answer which of the clicks have the highest value, conversion, transactions, and revenue. For example, when you can identify the widely used exit points of your website, you can display some of your most popular posts and other important content there. This could persuade the casual visitor to act on your desired goals. In addition, you get to know about your visitor's interest and focus.

In Page Analytics is a wonderful way for designers, marketers, analysts, and website publishers/owners in general, to get a virtual firsthand look at the nature and frequency of interaction.
between the visitors and all page elements on the site. In Page Analytics visualizes prospective changes with regards to layout, design, and positioning.

Figure 12: In Page Analytics visualizes prospective changes with regards to layout, design, and positioning. (Image Source: Google Analytics)

From my experience, people tend to be more visual, so translating raw data into something more illustrative and meaningful is valuable to both you and your visitors.
Rule 41

Know Where to Seek Help

No question is so difficult to answer as that to which the answer is obvious.
- George Bernard Shaw, Irish Playwright

You are not alone in the confusing world of interpreting Google Analytics. There are plenty of resources available online as well as offline to get answers to all your questions. Since Google Analytics does not offer direct support, I recommend the following solutions.

Google Analytics Help

The Official Google Analytics Help Center is probably the first place to start as they provide articles, tips, tutorials, and answers to frequently asked questions, as well as a forum. You can find a "Help" link in the upper right corner of any Google Analytics web page.

Books

There appear to be very few books written exclusively on Google Analytics. The books that are written on the subject are very informative. Two of the more popular and recommended readings are Advanced Web Metrics with Google Analytics by Brian Clifton (2008) and Web Analytics: An Hour a Day by Avinash Kaushik (2007). Both authors are experts in Google Analytics and have dedicated websites to Google Analytics.

Google Analytics Authorized Consultants (GAAC)

If you are looking for quick consultation, training, detailed help, or long term support with your Google Analytics account then you can turn to an
authorized consultant. Companies that become Google authorized consultants have demonstrated a level of expertise and have met rigorous requirements. GAACs are rewarded with a Google Analytics Certified Partners logo so that they are more easily identifiable. Google Analytics lists all certified partners at http://www.google.com/analytics/partners.html.

Figure 13: Clicking on the small question mark next to each metric will provide a brief description—available in the "older" version of Analytics only

Blogs

Blogs are a great source of information. Of course, where else would you go but to the Google Analytics blog (http://analytics.blogspot.com)? Occam’s Razor by Avinash Kaushik (http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/) and Measuring Success (http://www.advanced-web-metrics.com/blog/), the official blog for the aforementioned book, Advanced Web Metrics with Google Analytics by Brian Clifton, are two informative blogs on the subject of Google Analytics (see Appendix B: Resources).

Other Sources

Take part in the Google community and start a discussion that you are curious about. An example can be found at online community website, Get Satisfaction http://bit.ly/obbiTR.14

You can also subscribe to a feed of Analytics Market, a blog about Google Analytics, by going to http://feeds.feedburner.com/AnalyticsMarket.

getsatisfaction.com/google/products/google_google_analytics
Rule 42

These Are My Rules. What Are Yours?

Rules are not necessarily sacred, principles are.
- Franklin D. Roosevelt

Congratulations! If you are reading this chapter then you clearly understand that Google Analytics is one of the most important aspects to marketing online and measuring your website's success. And you should know by now that what you can't or don't measure cannot be changed or improved. So, segmenting your audience, adding filters, enabling e-commerce, or using In Page Analytics and all the other features mentioned in this book should now be of serious interest.

Without it, there will be a lot of uncertainty, ineffectiveness, and unnecessary spending in the long run. That's how essential Google Analytics is to any business, website owner, or marketing manager. It also builds confidence. You will be able to make proactive decisions, address areas of improvement, plan ahead, and eventually meet your objectives. Overall, it will help you plan for maximum success by serving as a solid foundation for a stable website.

Analytics is impossibly hard to ignore. Everyone is talking about it, writing and jumping on the analytics bandwagon. Social media conglomerates, Facebook and Twitter, have even joined in the fun. Yet, there is even more fun to be had. What was covered in this book is merely a list of best practices and features that may be helpful to improving your website's success. My goal was to give the beginning user some basic understanding into:

- Preparing you for what you need to know about Google Analytics
• Focusing on areas of interest in order to make decisions
• Identifying specific reports so you get the information you need
• Taking specific action steps to help you optimize the data
• Knowing what to do with the data

There are a lot of features that were not even covered in this book. For example, there’s the site speed report that will allow you to see how quickly your content was loaded for visitors. Or, there is the plot rows feature that allows you to mark off rows on a data table and see those segments displayed in your timeline for a quicker way into gaining insight into the performance of your traffic. The point being is that the potential for new features in Google Analytics is endless as time goes on.

According to Google, the future challenge for improving Google Analytics is not necessarily the lack of data, but the ability of tools to create actionable insights from that data. This makes me think that Google is still putting the end user at the forefront. They even seem to be aiming for a better control for multiple users to include more user levels, easier implementation, multiple dashboards, and easier sharing across users.

What the future holds remains a mystery. Though, I am optimistic and enthusiastic. For now, the rules outlined in this book showcase a number of common features that will help you prepare for online success.

If I missed anything obvious to some then I apologize in advance. However, I would invite you to share your ideas on my blog at http://rso-consulting.com/blog.php. I would also be curious to know how you have applied my rules, or others, to your advantage. So, let’s keep the conversation going. What rules and best practices would you like to share?
Appendix
Glossary

- **Auto tagging**—a feature in AdWords that automatically tags each of your ad destination URLs with tracking URLs in order to display the AdWords keywords and cost details in Google Analytics
- **Backlinks**—also known as external links, a backlink represents a link from an external website to your website
- **Bounce rate**—the percentage of single-page visits, or visits in which the person left your site from the entrance (landing) page
- **Click paths**—the sequence of hyperlinks one or more website visitors follow on a given site
- **Click through rate (CTR)**—calculated by dividing the number of users who clicked on an ad on a web page by the number of times the ad was delivered (impressions)
- **Clicks**—the number of clicks for which you paid and which your ads received
- **Conversion**—getting a visitor to take a desired action on your website, such as opting in to an email newsletter, purchasing a product, or downloading a white paper
- **Conversion rate (CR)**—the ratio of visitors who convert casual content views or website visits into desired actions
- **Cost per conversion**—also known as cost per lead or cost per application; cost per conversion allows you to measure how much you spent on
marketing to obtain a lead, application, or conversion—it is calculated by taking the ad spend and dividing by the number of conversions

- **Direct traffic**—traffic that came to a web site via bookmarks or by directly typing in the URL
- **Funnel**—represents the path that you expect visitors to take on their way to converting to the goal
- **Hits**—a request for a file from a server—whether it is an HTML file, an image, a CSS file, or a JavaScript file—and are in no way a measure of the number of visitors that view a site
- **Impressions**—the number of times your ads were displayed
- **Key performance indicator (KPI)**—pre-determined metrics that help you define and measure progress toward organizational goals
- **Pageviews**—a request for a file that is defined as a page
- **Pay per click (PPC)**—an advertising payment model that requires the advertiser to pay when a user clicks on a sponsored advertisement appearing in the search engine results
- **Referring site**—the website that a visitor comes from
- **Regular expression**—also known as regex; provides a way for matching strings of text, such as particular characters, words, or patterns of characters
- **Return on investment (ROI)**—also known as invested capital; ROI is calculated by taking the total capital of the investment (gain minus cost of investment) and dividing by the cost of investment
- **Returning visitor**—a visitor that has made at least one previous visit to a website
- **Search engine marketing (SEM)**—includes all activities, such as SEO, PPC, or a combination of the two, that undertake to promote a product or service through search engines
- **Search engine optimization (SEO)**—activities undertaken to generate traffic to a website through the natural or organic results in a search engine
- **Unique visitor**—an individual who visits a website during a given period of time, and does not take into account, multiple visits made by the same individual
- **Visit**—a series of requests from the same uniquely identified client within a given time period often 30 minutes
Appendix

Resources

- Google
  - Google Analytics blog
    http://analytics.blogspot.com
  - Google’s Keyword Tool
    http://bit.ly/2c0iJz
  - Help Forum
    http://bit.ly/11qr1Q
  - Trends
    http://www.google.com/trends
  - URL Builder
    http://bit.ly/7dJR
- Measuring Success, official blog for the book, Advanced Web Metrics with Google Analytics by Brian Clifton
  http://www.advanced-web-metrics.com/blog
- LunaMetrics, Google Analytics Certified Partner
  http://www.lunametrics.com/
- Market Terms.com,
  http://www.marketingterms.com/
- Occam's Razor, a blog by Avinash Kaushik
  http://www.kaushik.net/avinash
- e-nor blog
  http://www.e-nor.com/blog/

    adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal
    www.google.com/support/forum/p/Google+Analytics?hl=en
    www.google.com/support/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=55578
About the Author

As founder of RSO Consulting, Rob Sanders brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the world of online marketing. He and his team provide creative and technical solutions across many verticals, including healthcare, e-commerce, technology, law, and finance. RSO Consulting’s core competencies include search engine marketing (pay per click management and search engine optimization), social media optimization, and web analytics consulting.

Prior to moving to San Francisco, Rob was an Interactive Project Manager chosen to lead multi-million dollar online initiatives for Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan. Rob started his online career as a Web Producer for USA Today Online in 1994 before moving to Philadelphia to help launch an online media service at The Sports Network.
Rob was honorably discharged from the U.S. military after serving four years abroad. He volunteers for a number of non-profit organizations and splits his time between his homes in San Francisco and Murica, Spain, with his wife, Kathy, and two dogs, Pepe and Paco.
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Rob Sanders brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the world of online marketing. He currently works with a diverse group of companies providing creative and technical solutions for online growth including overseeing their search engine marketing, social networking, blogs & video.

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