

Analyzing Google Analytics

Understanding the Basics

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Google Analytics is a fantastic free tool from Google, the main purpose of which is to provide business owners with all the information they need on the people who visit their websites. Some of that information can be very complex for those who are not familiar with the system. This guide has been written to help readers ease into this world of endless information and numbers, exploring some of the basics of Google Analytics and how to interpret the information found there.

The 3 Sources of Web Traffic

One of the first things a business owner should get familiar with is knowing how a customer can reach their business website. There are three ways:

1. Direct
2. Referral
3. Search

To further explain these sources, let's use an example for each traffic source: someone who ends up on Amazon.com.

Direct

Direct traffic means that the person already knew the website address and directly typed it into the address bar. This would be the person who types in "Amazon.com" to their address bar. They did not have to search for it, they just knew what the website was called and they typed it.



Referral

The second way a user get to a website is through a referral. A website or email that links to another website would be a referral. So to use our example, our visitor was reading something on the internet about the Harry Potter books, and saw a link saying, “Click here to buy the Harry Potter books.” When they clicked the link, they were referred to Amazon.com to purchase the Harry Potter books.

Search

The third method is when someone uses a search engine like Google to find what they are looking for. Searches rely on keywords or key terms. These are the information you type into the search bar, which let the search engine know what information it should display. Once a user enters a keyword, the search engine will find results that it deems most relevant to the keyword. So to use our example, someone goes to Google and searches for “buy Harry Potter book.” The keywords in this case are “buy,” “Harry Potter,” and “book.” The keyword “buy” indicates that the user is interested in purchasing something. The keyword “Harry Potter” tells Google that the user wants to see something related to Harry Potter. And the keyword “book” says the user are looking for a book. Put the whole phrase together and Google predicts that the user is looking to purchase a book from the Harry Potter series. So the first result would likely be a page on Amazon.com to purchase the book.



All of this information is very important to a business owner. First, it shows the public's awareness of a website by measuring how many people already know their URL and visit directly. Second, this data shows business owners what other places online are referring people to their website. Third, a business owner can see what kind of keywords people are using to get the search results that lead to their website.

Reading Google Analytics Keyword Data

Direct traffic and referral traffic are important, and Google Analytics helps you measure those. But where Google Analytics really shines is its ability to help you improve your search traffic by optimizing your keywords.

Now that some of the basics have been explained, let's actually look at a screen shoot of Google Analytics and talk about how to read the Google Analytics dashboard. Right now we are focusing on the keyword searches.





Primary Dimension: Keyword Source Landing Page Other

Plot Rows Secondary dimension Sort Type: Default

Keyword ?	Acquisition			Behavior		
	Sessions ? ↓	% New Sessions ?	New Users ?	Bounce Rate ?	Pages / Session ?	Avg. Session Duration ?
	807 <small>% of Total: 18.93% (4,262)</small>	81.66% <small>Avg for View: 59.41% (37.46%)</small>	659 <small>% of Total: 26.03% (2,532)</small>	72.00% <small>Avg for View: 68.96% (4.40%)</small>	2.11 <small>Avg for View: 2.39 (-11.87%)</small>	00:01:52 <small>Avg for View: 00:02:18 (-19.29%)</small>
1. (not provided)	705 (87.36%)	84.82%	598 (90.74%)	75.04%	1.99	00:01:37
2. gosmallbiz.com	7 (0.87%)	28.57%	2 (0.30%)	28.57%	4.29	00:03:16

The screen seen here can be accessed by selecting the “Acquisition” tab, going into the “Campaigns” drop down menu and selecting the “Organic Keywords” section.

In this example, there are three rows and two entries. The top row shows the average numbers for the entire site. The second row, the first entry, says the keyword is “not provided.” This means that Google will not reveal what keywords the user searched for to come to the website. Google restricts access to some information to protect the privacy of its users. There is nothing a business owner can do about it.

The next row has a keyword of “gosmallbiz.com.” This means that people have found the GoSmallBiz website by searching the keyword “gosmallbiz.com” and then clicking on one of the search results.



Acquisition

Now we're going to clarify the data in each column. The first few columns are broadly labeled "Acquisition" because they deal with how you acquired visitors to your site. See the column labeled "Sessions." Every time a person lands on a website, it is logged as a session. From the time they go onto a website until the time they exit out of the website is counted as one session. It doesn't matter if the same person has been to the website before; each new time they visit the site, it is logged as a session.¹ So in the case shown above, 7 sessions can be attributed to people searching the keyword "gosmallbiz.com" within the given time period.

The next column is "% New Sessions." This tells what percentage of sessions were from users making their first visit to the website within the given time period. A high percentage indicates a lot of visitors who log a single session on the site. A low percentage indicates that users are logging multiple sessions. So the data can be read as saying that 28.57% of the sessions in the given time period from visitors who searched for "gosmallbiz.com" were new users.² The actual number of new sessions can be seen in the next column, titled "New Users."

EXAMPLES

1. For example, if the data says that there were two sessions, it could mean that two people have searched the keyterm and found the website. Or it could mean that one person has searched the keyterm twice and found the website each time.
2. A user may have visited the site before the time period you are looking at (for example, you are looking at the last two weeks, and the user may have visited a month ago), but their first session on the website during the given time period will be logged as a new session. If they visit again during the time period, the second (and third, and fourth, and so on) visits are not new sessions.



Behavior

The next series of columns are broadly labeled “Behavior,” because they are measuring what visitors to your site did when they visited. First you will see the column “Bounce Rate,” which is measured in percentages. The bounce rate shows what percentage of people landed on a page, looked only at that page, and then left the site without ever doing anything else. A high bounce rate is a negative, because it means people left your site without looking at any of your other pages. A low bounce rate indicates that visitors land on the page and then are interested enough to look at other pages.

The next column, “Pages/Session,” is directly affected by the bounce rate. It is the average number of pages interacted with by each user per session. Using the “gosmallbiz.com” row, the average user that searched that keyword interacted with 4.29 pages per session while on the website. The higher number of pages per session, the better, because the more pages someone looks at on your site, the more likely they are to purchase.

The last column is “Avg Session Duration.” This shows the average time users spend on the website. So to continue with the “gosmallbiz.com” row, the average visitor using that keyword stayed on the site for 3 minutes and 16 seconds. Usually business owners want people to spend as much time on the site as possible because it increases the chances of the user buying something or contacting the business.



There will usually be a correlation between the three columns under the “Behavior” heading. A higher bounce rate will reduce the number of pages per session and the average time on site, and a low bounce rate will have the opposite effect. So to use the example above, people who used the keyword “gosmallbiz.com” had a lower bounce rate, 28.57%, a higher number of pages per session, 4.29, and a longer average time on the site, 3:16, than the average for all visitors, which can be seen as the top numbers on the column.

Using Keyword Data to Improve Your Website

So how does the keyword data in Google Analytics help you with your website? There are a variety of ways this information is relevant to what you’re doing.

First, you can see what keywords people are searching to come to your site using the “Acquisition” data. Using that information, you can tailor your website to reflect those searches. Just as an example, imagine that you own a cookie business, ABC Cookies. Google Analytics tells you that there are three main keywords people search to find the website: “Chocolate Chip Cookie” was searched 1,000 times, “Sugar Cookie” was searched 500 times, and “Oatmeal Raisin Cookie” was searched 100 times.



This is a clear indication that people visiting your site are much more interested in chocolate chip cookies than in the oatmeal raisin. So to accommodate that preference, you might adjust the site to feature chocolate chip cookies more, perhaps by using them for the main image on the site, or listing them as a best-seller. Alternatively, if you're looking to sell more oatmeal raisin cookies and the Google Analytics keyword data is telling you that not as many people are looking for that, you might choose to sell them at discounted prices to generate more interest. When the business owner knows what the visitors to his or her website are looking for, it's a great advantage.

You can also use the "Behavior" data. As mentioned earlier, the bounce rate, pages per session, and average time per session are all connected. And the more a potential customer interacts with a website, the more likely they are to purchase or contact the business. So you first might do things to decrease the bounce rate, which requires getting people to interact with more than just one page on the site. The method here is simply to have more things on the webpage to interact with.

For an example, remember the ABC Cookies business. Perhaps a visitor came to the ABC Cookies website because they were looking to find a chocolate chip cookies recipe. The first page they landed on had the recipe they were looking for, and they had no reason to interact with anything else on the website, so they left. To Google Analytics, that counts as a "bounce."



But if you add links to “related recipes,” or suggest additional recipes for people who like the recipe they have already found, the visitor who was about to leave has a reason to stay and explore the site further. Or perhaps you might put a discount offer on the first recipe page for a box of cookies. The user now has the option to click that offer and actually purchase something from the site. To get people to do more on your website, you first have to give them more to do.

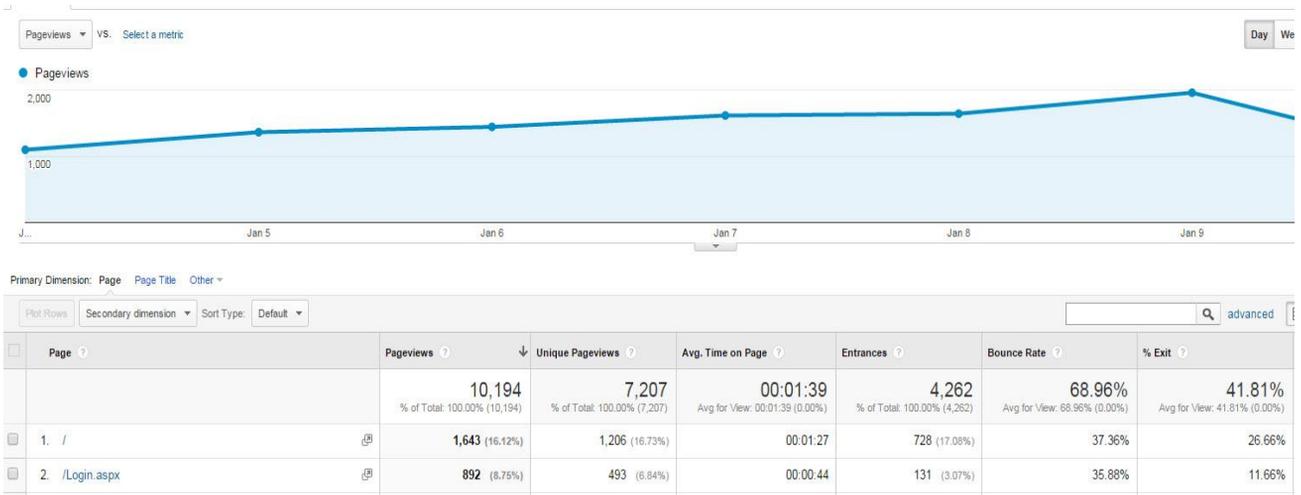
Another way for a business owner to improve the analytics data is to implement social share options for networks such as Facebook and Twitter. If a visitor likes the recipe they find at the ABC Cookies site and thinks other will, too, they can easily share it with their friends. That gives the business free publicity, and drives more traffic—creating additional sessions.

With a few simple additions, our hypothetical user who landed on the recipe page and was about to leave now has the option to view more recipes, purchase something, or share the recipe with their friends. All of these things can work together to greatly decrease the site’s bounce rate and increase the average pages per session and average time on site.



Measuring Page Performance

Google Analytics can not only help you see how people are getting to a website, but they also show what webpages visitors are actually looking at. Look at the image below showing a sample analytics page.



You can reach by clicking on the “Behavior” tab, then the “Site Content” drop down and then the “All Pages” section.

Pageviews

Knowing which pages are visited most frequently is great information to have. Let’s start by defining the terms you’ll see in Google Analytics so you can understand what the data is saying. The first column, “Pages,” should be self-explanatory. It gives a list of the names of the pages on the website. You’ll notice that the first row in the example above only has a “/” symbol.



That symbol is used by Google Analytics to signify the homepage of the website. Since the example is from GoSmallBiz.com, that row signifies data for visits to the GoSmallBiz homepage. The next row, “/Login.aspx,” is the page title of a specific page on GoSmallBiz.com (specifically, the page for members to log in to their GoSmallBiz accounts).

The next column, “Pageviews,” counts how many times each page was viewed. Every time someone visits the page, it counts as one page view. If 20 people visit a page once each, that is 20 page views. If one person visits a page 20 times, that is also 20 page views. Using the first row in the example above, the “/” homepage was visited 1,643 times.

“Unique Pageviews” is the next column, and it differs from the total page views by only counting each visitor to a page once. So if one person goes to the same webpage 20 times, that is 20 page views, but only 1 unique page view. This metric measures the true number of people that visited a specific webpage by weeding out people who go to the same page multiple times in a given time period. Again using the data from the example above, we see that the “/” homepage had 1,206 unique page views.

Both total page views and unique page views are useful metrics with different advantages. The advantage with unique users is seeing how many people have seen the page. The advantage with total visits and return users, however, is that it is much easier to sell to a return user than it is to a new visitor.



So a business owner should try to increase both unique visits and total visits, to maximize the number of people who are seeing the site and those who are coming back.

The “Avg. Time on Page” and the “Bounce Rate” columns have already been explained above, so let’s take on the next columns with the new vocabulary.

Entrances and Exits

“Entrances” requires some explanation. This is the number of times that a specific page has served as the landing page or starting page of a user’s visit to the site. No matter how many pages the visitor looks at, the very first page they saw is credited with one entrance. On the sample above, the “/” homepage is credited with 728 entrances out of 1,643 total page views. So that means that homepage was the first page a visitor landed on 728 times.

Let’s use the example of the ABC Cookies company again and the chocolate chip cookie recipe page. If a person landed on the page for the recipe, it would count as one entrance on that page. So even if the user looks at other pages on the website, they started at the chocolate chip cookie recipe page. However, if a visitor started on the oatmeal raisin page and then clicked onto the chocolate chip cookie page, the oatmeal raisin page would get the entrance, not the chocolate chip cookie page.



What makes this information useful is that it lets business owners know where on their website people are first arriving, and then they can adjust their site accordingly. Knowing which webpage users see first means that the business owner can make sure that particular page is has everything needed to make a great first impression. And if for some reason they do not want their customers focusing so much on that particular webpage, the business owner can attempt to drive traffic to other places on the website from that initial entrance page. Ideally, the entrance page should have all the information needed by users to make informed decisions about the business since it is making the first impression.

The final column is “% Exit.” These are the opposite of the entrance numbers. The exit percentage is the percentage of people who left the website directly from any specific page instead of going to look at other pages on the site. To look at the example analytics page above, 26.66% of the people who were on the “/” homepage left the site from that specific page. This is important information to know, because if business owners see a high percentage of people leaving from a particular page, they can try to diagnose the problem and adjust the page accordingly. The strategy for decreasing the exit percentage is the same as trying to decrease the bounce rate, since both are attempting to get the user to interact with another page on the site.



Conclusion

With the information you can gather using Google Analytics, you have the knowledge to improve your website, your digital marketing, and your business. If you have a website but do not have Google Analytics installed and you would like more information, please [visit here](#). If you do not have a website, let us build one for you. [Click here for more information.](#)

