GOOGLE® ANALYTICS 101

GUIDE

Written by:

VERTICAL MEASURES

Introduction

The advantage of digital marketing over traditional forms of marketing (print advertising, brochures, word of mouth) is the ability it offers to analyze data and measure effectiveness. Think about it: Every time someone takes an action on any of your digital properties – whether it's your website, Facebook® page or email newsletter – it becomes data. We can easily and more accurately learn about our customers' preferences, demographics, and behaviors online.

Older, traditional marketing data is difficult to collect, leading to a lot of guesswork and ineffective strategies. With digital marketing, you'll quickly know if you are on track to meet your goals by learning what's working in your content marketing strategy and what is holding it back. Actively measuring your content also helps you quickly tweak the strategy to drive better results, while uncovering components ripe for improvement.

Preparing for Measurement

Preparing for measurement is the next key step in the overall process. Without establishing proper, metric-based goals at the outset, the success or failure of a strategy is reduced to guesswork. These goals should be composed of KPIs (key performance indicators, or the numbers you want to hit) to accurately identify final outcomes.

Perhaps most important of all: The metrics must be SMART:

- **Specific** – "get more leads" is a goal, while "double leads from social media" is a specific goal.
- **Measureable** – "improve my brand's reputation" is measurable, but "increase customer referrals" is a measurable reputation goal.
- **Achievable** – increasing sales conversions is an achievable goal if you've got the means to do it.
- **Realistic** – "increase sales conversion over this period last year" might be more realistic than "outsell the number-one competitor in 30 days."
- **Timely** – "increase sales leads by 2 percent in 30 days" is a time-bound goal.

If one or all of these criteria are not specified in overall measurement (and KPIs), you increase the risk of missing important findings.

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Measuring Content

Measuring the content is where you'll determine if your goals have been met. Be careful not to get lost in data mining – it's easy to spend hours and hours mining through data and find that you've dug yourself into a hole that's irrelevant to your goals. It might be interesting data, but if it isn't relevant to your goals, then you're just mining data for the sake of mining data.

To keep yourself on track, ask yourself these questions:

- How many customers come to my properties? What pages do they visit? What content do they see and respond to?

- Can we make content more relevant to drive impact?

- How do we know when we've been successful? What is the impact on revenue?

- Did you achieve your goals? If so, what contributed to the success? Was there a breakout page that accounted for 90 percent of the conversions? Did a single channel drive the majority of high-converting traffic?

- If a goal wasn't achieved, why not? Did your landing page witness substantial traffic but few conversions? Was traffic so low that hitting the goal proved impossible?

- Is there is a high bounce rate (visitors navigating away from site after viewing one page)? Why? Was the call-to-action (CTA) weak or unclear? Think of ways to remedy high bounce rates from the perspective of the user.

What Should You Measure?

Measurement is the process of comparing the actual performance of your digital efforts against specific goals. Analyzing the difference between what the data delivered versus what was expected can identify strengths to build upon and opportunities for improvement.

Gauging if there is an alignment or a disconnect is determined through KPIs that provide insight into the effectiveness of the content. Different organizations track different KPIs, but these are some of the most common:

- Traffic volume

- Engagement

- Popular and problematic onsite content

- Sharable content

- Lead generation

- Brand awareness

The bulk of this guide will dive a little deeper into each of these metrics so you can understand what they mean, why they are important, how to measure them, and possible tactics you can take to improve their results.

Throughout this guide, we use what is known about how Google's algorithms work, as well and measurement tools, as points of reference when we talk about metrics, analytics, and key performance indicators (KPIs). The reason is that Google "owns" the vast majority of searches that people conduct online.

Traffic Volume

Traffic volume refers to the people who move in and around your website, and some common key performance indicators (KPIs) are:

- **Visits by traffic channel -** Google categorizes traffic in seven channels:

  1. **Organic search** – Example: A user types "veterinarian near me" into Google search, your business shows up in search results, and they click through to your site.
  2. **Direct** – Users type your website address into a browser, they click a bookmark or some other link in a document and arrive at your website.
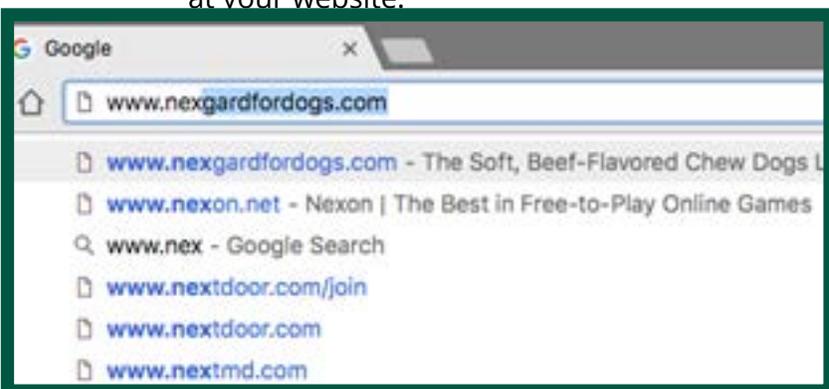
  3. **Email** – Users receive email messages from you or from someone else that mentions you in an email, and they click through to your website.
  4. **Referral** – A user is visiting another website, where they click on a link that takes them to your website.
  5. **Social** – Users on Facebook, Pinterest, and other social media sites see your content, and they click through to your website.
  6. **Paid search** – Users click on one of your paid online advertisements.

  7. **Other** – Anything that doesn't fall in the above six categories. For example, it could be a referral from a website that isn't tracked (like the other six channels are), such as a referral from an app, or users who are using the web in anonymous mode (they've turned off features like cookies).

- **Visits by source** – The specific URLs that refer traffic to your site (URL stands for "uniform resource locator," which is a fancy way of referring to the specific web address where content lives).

- **New visitors** – Amount of users who are new to your website.

- **Unique visitors** – Total users visiting your website, ignoring multiple visits.

Monitoring and understanding where digital traffic originates helps you track your content "reach," or the extent in which your content has influence. By measuring traffic volume by both channel and specific sources, you can determine the content's accessibility and relevancy across different audiences.

Website traffic is at the core of all online marketing efforts, and the key metrics should be the numbers of visits and sources of traffic. Traffic drives and feeds the success of the other goals in your strategy. Examining historical traffic data enables you to project anticipated traffic prior to a strategy launch.

If you've launched a new content strategy, what traffic trends did you notice after 30 days into your content launch? Do you see trends upward or down? Do you notice any spikes? Do you notice any new sources of traffic? Did something suddenly drop off? Identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities your content strategy has provided, and use that information to make changes (or keep doing what's working).

Engagement

Engagement refers to the way people interact when they are on your website or digital properties.

- **Pages viewed per session** – Where did users go on your website? How many pages did they visit?
- **Bounce rate** – How quickly do users leave your website?
- **Average time on page** – How much time do they spend on each page, as well as on your entire website?

There are a number of methods to measure engagement, but the most effective method is by looking at what your visitors do while they're on your site. By measuring where your visitors go on your site, you can track the general interest of visitors and understand what content performs well. Measuring engagement by traffic channel (and source) helps to identify the quality of the traffic while pinpointing those visitors who show the greatest potential to convert to a sale.

At its most basic level, content should provide practical value while encouraging people to explore your website and the services or products you offer. To determine if this is happening, you have to measure how effectively your content is engaging potential customers by anchoring your audience to your website.

Be careful how you interpret the data, though. For example, a high bounce rate can signal very different meanings, depending on the page. If your "Contact us" page has a high bounce rate, that could mean that visitors find what they are looking for – your phone number or directions to your clinic – and that's a good thing. However, a high bounce rate on another page might be a signal that there's something wrong with your content, or you're attracting the wrong audience to your content.

Sharable Content

Sharable content measures that highly desirable word-of-mouth marketing, where people found so much value in your content that they tell their friends, family and followers about it.

- **Social shares** – Users found value in your content, whether it was on your website or your social media channels, and they clicked your "share" buttons.

Though social media metrics may be more difficult to quantify in terms of a dollar amount, they still deliver value. Social media generates referral traffic and conversions and builds awareness – all factors that are important in determining content marketing success. The channel also provides insights on how customers and prospective customers share your content and the overall sentiment toward your business.

Lead Generation

A lead is someone who lands on your website and has taken an action or indicated they have some level of interest in your business. What do you want them to do when they arrive? You want them to become customers and/or advocates for your business, which you can do through:

- Fill-form completion
- Contact us form
- Request for information
- Blog subscriptions

A visitor to your website becomes a lead when he or she "converts." You define what a conversion is. For example:

- It might be when they download a guide about puppy care in exchange for giving you their email address.
- It might be when they submit a request for pricing information through your website.
- It might be some other action that you define.

The important thing is that there must be an exchange of information that puts them into your sales funnel: They provided their contact information in exchange for your content. They've indicated that they're interested in your business.

Keep in mind that the most important part of measuring lead generation is the ability to attribute sales (or other end goals) to a user's first conversion. This can be done by tracking where a lead originated, say from a blog post or video, and then following it to determine where along the path the conversion occurred. Not all visitors to your website will be sales leads; some are there for quick information, while others might be your competitors, vendors, job-seekers, or someone who lands on your site accidentally.

Enhancing Brand Awareness

- **Branded keyword searches** - Searcher familiarity with your service/business name
- **Direct traffic** - Searchers who have directly typed in your website's URL address
- **Surveys** - A way to test your brand's awareness

Brand awareness is a desired goal for most marketing campaigns, but it can be a challenge to measure in a content strategy. To accurately determine if brand awareness is being enhanced through content, a combination of metrics should be measured.

- **Branded keywords:** One common metric is the number and search volumes of branded keywords bringing traffic to your website. If your brand name is unique, the logical explanation for increased branded keyword traffic is familiarity with your specific brand. In other words, an increase in searches for terms unique to your brand indicate a general uptick in brand awareness.
- **Direct traffic:** Another metric – used in conjunction with measuring branded keywords – is to track an increase in direct traffic. Direct traffic signals users who have typed in your website's URL and visited the site without being prompted to by other websites or search engines. An increase in users typing in your organization's URL specifically correlates to a boost in people learning about your brand through other means.
- **Market surveys:** One final way to measure brand awareness is through the use of surveys of random people who may or may not have heard of your brand. These can be extensive and costly, so they should be centered on large, wide-scale content campaigns.

"The most important part of measuring lead generation is the ability to attribute sales (or other end goals) to a user's first conversion."
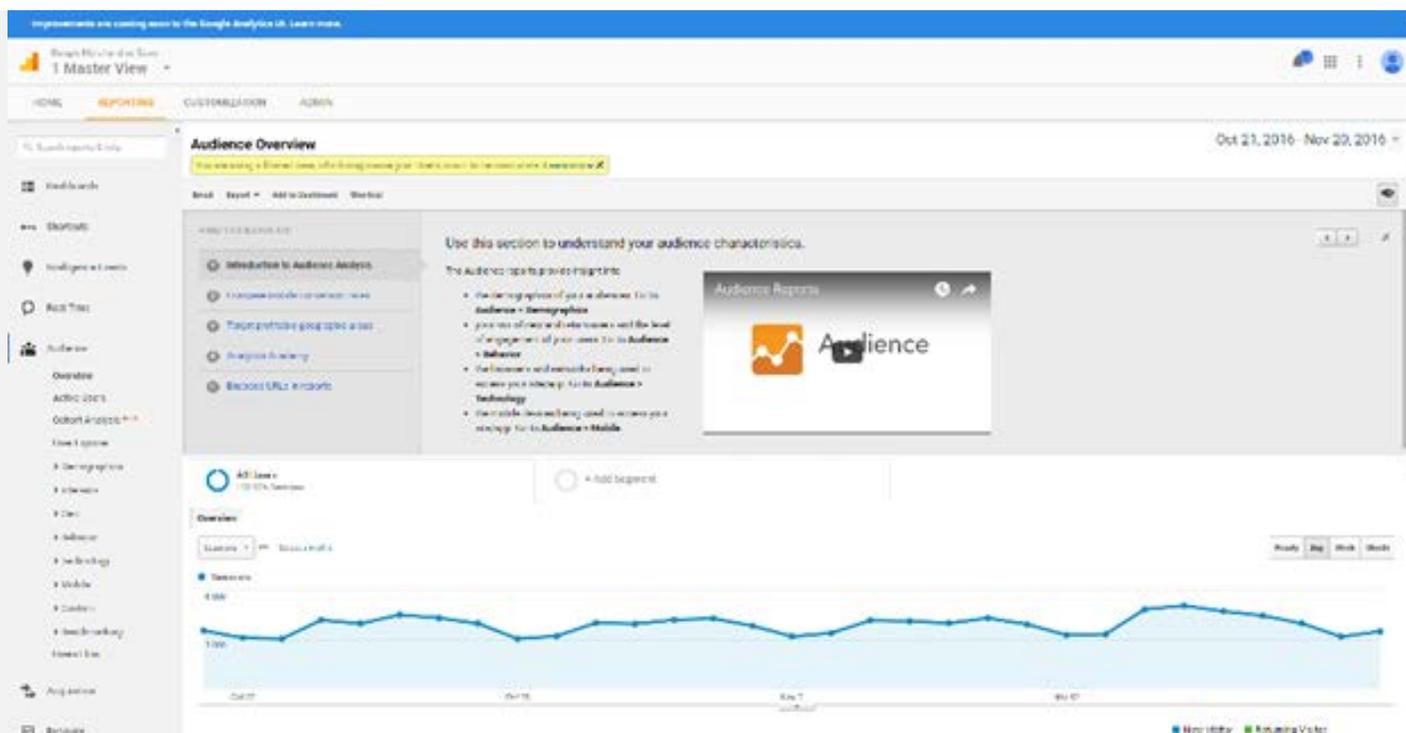
Google Analytics

Google Analytics is an online platform used for gathering detailed statistics and information about site visitors, how they got there, and what they do once on your website. Setting up Google Analytics requires basic HTML and web development knowledge to implement on a website. If you have yet to set up your website, we strongly recommend adding Google

Analytics to the list of tools you want added. If you already have a website, your site builder should be able to add this tool if it isn't already installed on your site.

Keep in mind that Google Analytics is not the only search engine analytical tool. While Google happens to be the most common search engine, Yahoo!®, Bing ®, YouTube ®, and other large websites have search tools related to them.

Getting to Know Google Analytics Dashboard

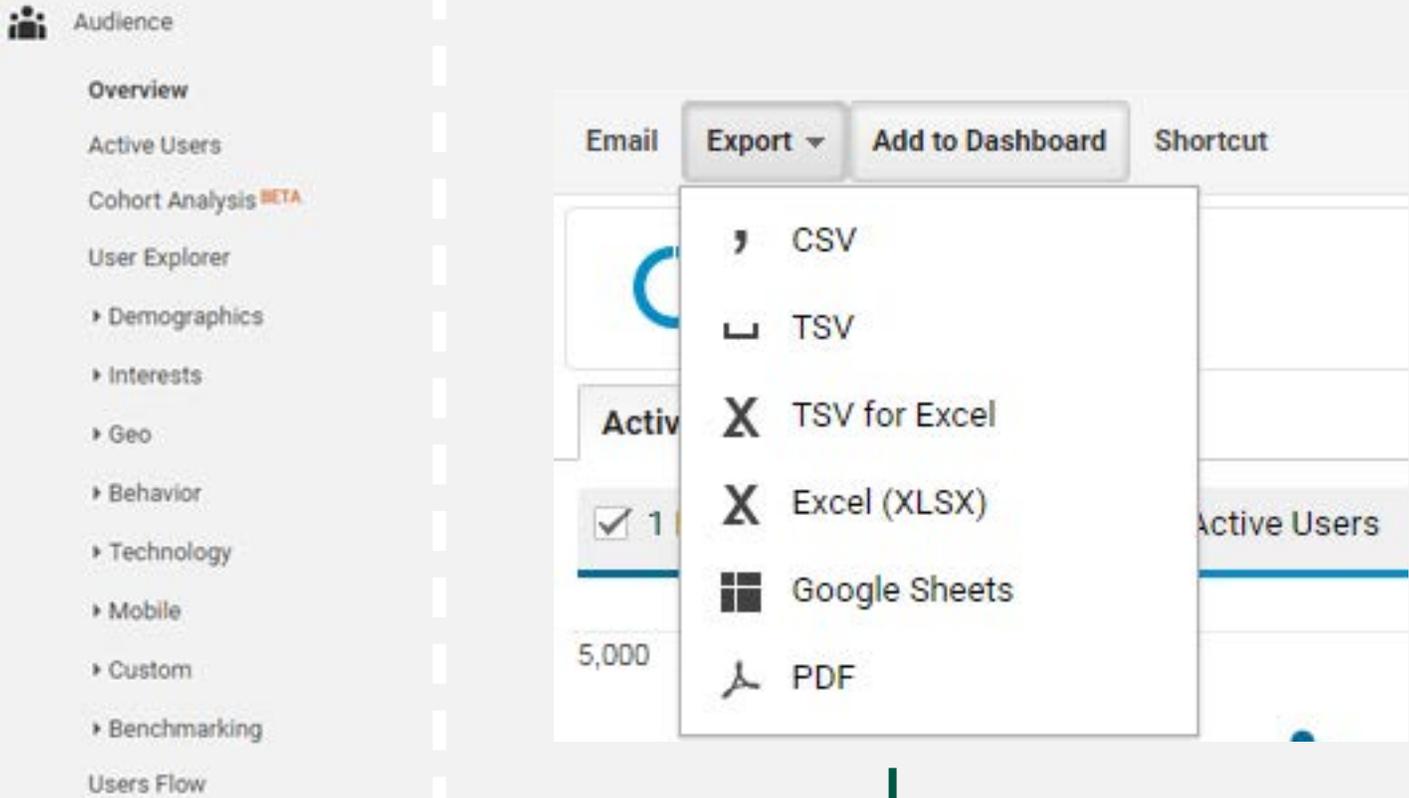Once Google Analytics is added, you'll be presented with a dashboard screen similar to this:

The Google Analytics "Master View" is divided into several important sections.

Here is where you will find an overview of your audience data within specific time frames graphed as a function of whatever tab you click. Here is also where you can easily get lost in data mining! Start by looking at Google Analytics' default settings, so you can get a picture of where you are today.

If you're looking to extract your website data, you can export your data in various formats:

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Action Plan: You've read through this guide, and now you're ready to get started. Here's a checklist for your action items:

1. Set up Google Analtyics.
2. Take a Google Analytics free online course. You can access Google Analytics Academy here, and a Google Analytics demo account **here**.
3. Create a list of what you want to measure.

What are your content marketing objectives?	How will you know if you've met or missed your objectives?	What key performance indicator (KPI) will you monitor?
Ex: Increase awareness for my brand (the name of your veterinary clinic, for example)	We'll know this based on the number of people who search for our clinic by name on Google.	Branded keyword searches

4. Monitor your KPIs.
5. Adjust your objectives as needed, based on your monthly analytics. Celebrate your successes!

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Glossary of Terms

As you get started with analytics, you'll need to know some common terms used throughout SEO.

- **Hit** - A "hit" refers to any time that your website receives a request to access from a source. Think of hits as the amount of times your website is accessed.

- **Pageview** - Refers to the number of visits for a specific page on your website. Webpages that have been optimized for search (and are relevant to your audience) will likely have more pageviews.

- **Visit** - A collection of data on a single user. A visit will track pageviews the visitor made before exiting your website.

- **Visitors** - You may have noticed this term has already been used a couple of times in previous definitions. A visitor has a unique ID associated with them, stored by the use of cookies.

- **Cookies** - Small text files stored on a user's browser that are interpreted by the sites they visit. For example, if you visit a social networking site that remembers your username, chances are your browser has a cookie with that information on it.

- **Bounce** - When a visitor visits only one page of your website and ends the session. An example of this is someone Google searching "dogs," clicking on a link only to find an article on dog food. They will click back to their search results, as this was not what they were searching for.

- **Time on Page/Time on Site** - Simply the difference between the time a visitor leaves a page and the time they entered the page. Similarly, the time on site is the difference between the time a visitor left the site and the time they entered it. A low time on site may reflect a high bounce rate.

- **Dollar Index** - The rate that visitors are being converted into sales. If your dollar index for a particular page is high, the page was viewed directly before the visitor purchased something or converted.

- **Referring Sites** - Traffic from external websites. This means that a website is sending visitors to a specific page on your website

- **Google Analytics API** - Want to sort your data collected in Google Analytics? The API tool allows you to export your data to a tool such as Excel for analysis.