

GA4 Survival Guide

Our Quick Start Guide For Making A Seamless Transition to GA4



Making the Switch Can Be Effortless

With Universal Analytics sunsetting on July 1, 2023, GA4 represents the future of analytics. If the switch feels daunting or you are confused by GA4's new interface and features, then here are the essentials to get you started in the right direction!

[Download Our Solutions Guide](#)

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Introduction

No Substitute For Experience

The nuances of GA4 are best understood when exploring the platform. Though this guide may help establish a baseline knowledge of GA4's latest features, we recommend that you conduct an initial navigation of the platform first and then come back here with your questions. You might be surprised with how familiar some of the features feel despite the revised interface.

If Advanced Assistance Is Required

This guide is not intended to provide a detailed walkthrough of every feature. Rather, we've selected the key principles that will help you find a sure footing with GA4 and leverage best practices for data tracking, reporting, and analysis. If special assistance is required, we recommend one of the following options:

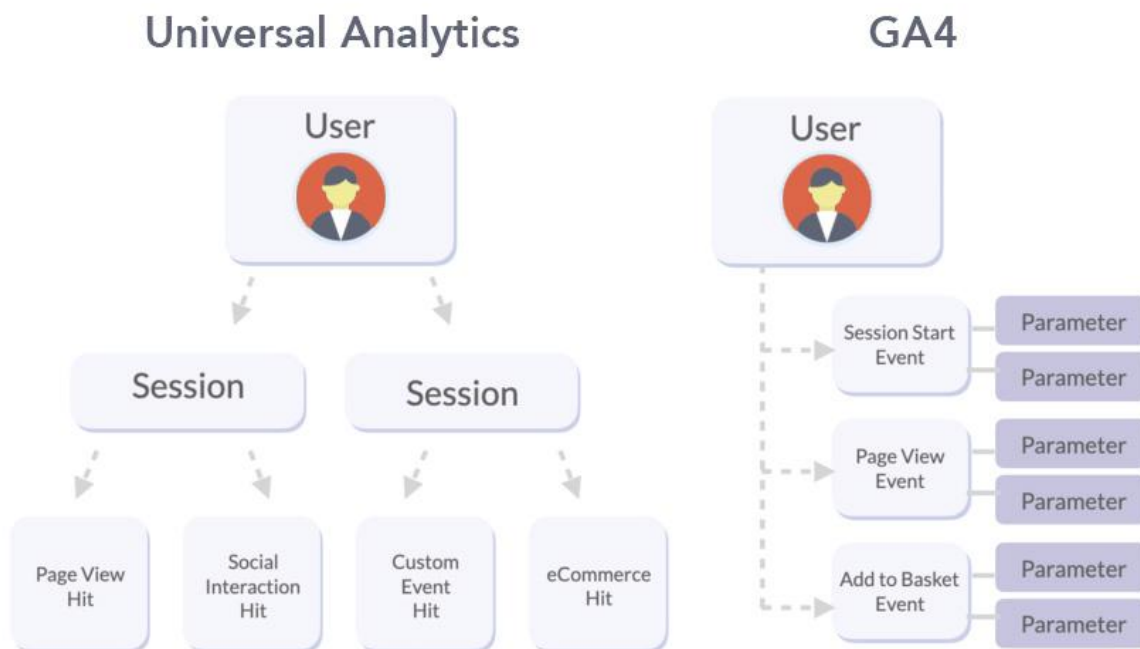
1. Schedule a Consultation With Your Marketing or Advertising Partner
2. Explore Solutions in Google Analytics Help Center

[Access Analytics Help Center](#)

Need To Know: Data Model

GA4's Event-Driven Methodology

"Why the switch to GA4?" is a commonly asked question, especially when Universal Analytics (UA) seemed to be fulfilling attribution needs. The **short answer** is that Google has evolved their data collection, adopting a user-centric approach that enables deeper insights about consumer behavior. UA's session-centric design limited their ability to provide these deeper behavioral insights, hence the reason GA4 was born. With GA4, all user interactions are now classified as events and no longer aggregate at a session level.



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The **long answer** for why GA4 exists is because UA primarily relied on tracking user interactions through page views. This method was moderately effective in understanding user behavior, as it helped observe which pages were visited by users and how much time they spent on them. However, this approach had certain limitations, primarily because it didn't fully capture the breadth and depth of user engagement. It left significant gaps in data collection by not taking into account various other types of user interactions, such as video playback, link clicks, form submissions, and other custom events.

With the introduction of GA4, the tracking of user interactions has evolved into a more holistic and dynamic approach. In GA4, each user interaction, irrespective of its type, is classified as an 'event'. This methodology provides a more granular understanding of user behavior, as every action taken by a user on a website or app is tracked, analyzed, and measured.

In contrast to UA, where data tracking was tied to sessions, GA4's event-based model allows for independent tracking of each interaction. This means user activities are tracked separately from the overall session, allowing for more accurate data collection and analysis of individual interactions.

Furthermore, GA4 offers more flexibility with its reporting tools. Events can be defined, modified, and even turned on or off at your discretion. This means you can customize the data collection to suit your specific needs, focusing on the interactions that matter most to your business. This flexibility allows for more detailed and relevant insights, ultimately enabling more effective decision-making.

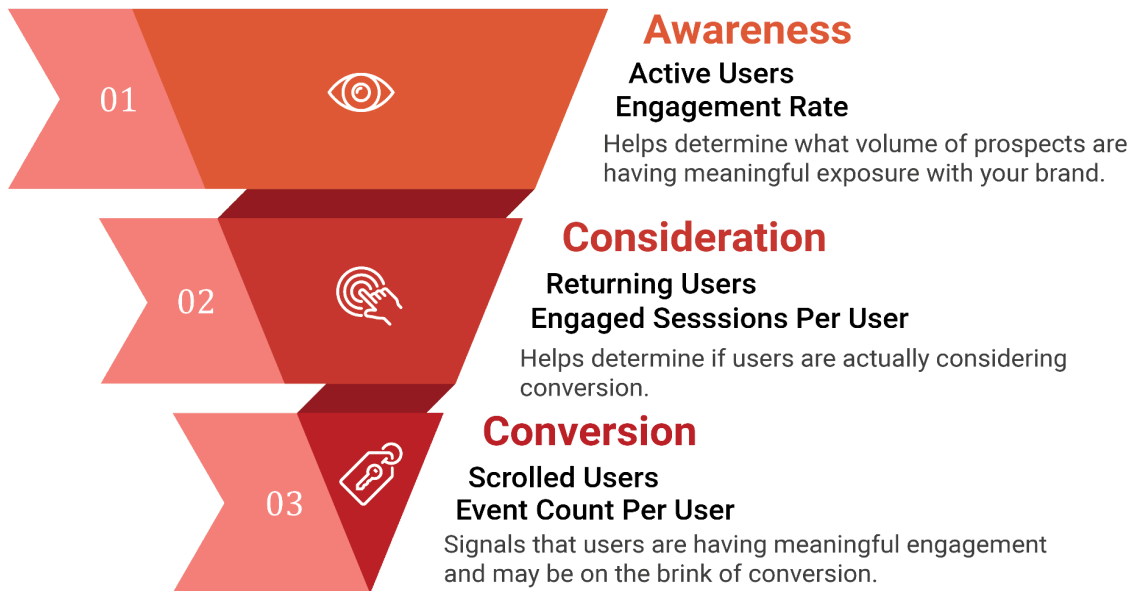
New Engagement Metrics

GA4's event-driven data model brings a suite of new metrics mostly centered around user engagement with your website or app. With nearly 100 metrics available across the platform, we've identified the **Top 10 metrics we believe will have the most impact for your brand:**

New Metric	Description
Engaged Session	Whenever a user's session results in: 1 conversion, 2 pageviews, or 10 seconds of time on a page.
Engaged Sessions Per User	Average number of engaged sessions per user.
Average Engagement Time	The average amount of time that an active user spends on your website or app during a session.
Engagement Rate	The percentage of sessions that were engaged sessions.
Active Users	Unique visitors who had an engaged session.
Scrolled Users	Number of users who scrolled 90% of a page.
Returning Users	Users who logged a previous session.
Event Count	Total number of events (or user interactions) triggered.
Event Count Per User	The average number of events a user will cumulatively trigger.
Events Per Session	The average number of events that occur during a session.

Are GA4's New Metrics actually impactful for my attribution strategy?

These new metrics provide waypoints for better understanding consumer behavior. If leveraged correctly, they can help you identify areas within a full-funnel marketing approach that are ripe with opportunity or might require improvement. **Here is a general overview of how some metrics might fit within your attribution strategy:**



How do GA4's New Metrics compare to UA's metrics?

Though GA4's new metrics share some familiarity with UA's metrics, it's important to note that they are not the same, and therefore

UA Metric	GA4 Metric	Difference
Users	Active Users	Active Users is like Users, they both total the number of unique website visitors, but Active Users excludes "bounced" users from the calculation.
Bounce Rate	Engagement Rate	Engagement Rate is the inverse of Bounce Rate. It more accurately captures the percentage of individuals who engage with your website.
Avg Session Duration	Avg Engagement Time	Avg Engagement Time is like Avg Session Duration, they both total the average time a user spends on a website during a single session, but Avg Engagement Time excludes "bounced" users from

		the calculation.
Pages Per Session	Events Per Session	Events Per Session is like Pages Per Session, they both represent user engagement on your website, however the measurement of 'Events' instead of 'Pages' provides a more accurate portrayal if a user is actually engaged (i.e. a user only visits 1 page, but logs 15 events on that 1 page).

Why does it seem that I get worse performance with GA4's New Metrics?

Though GA4's new metrics share some familiarity with UA's metrics, it would be unfair to benchmark performance based on direct comparisons. With GA4 metrics centered on user engagement instead of sessions, the reported values may seem smaller because some metrics only account for engaged audiences instead of the total number of users that visit your website (i.e. Refer to Active Users metric in the chart above). Performance goals should be revisited to determine what a healthy report looks like; GA4's new metrics may even reveal areas in need of improvement as you discover a more holistic view of how users are engaging with your website.

Any examples of the difference between Engagement Rate and Bounce Rate?

In GA4, Bounce Rate merely represents the inverse of Engagement Rate (i.e. a 52% Engagement Rate equals a 48% Bounce Rate). However, Bounce Rate is also calculated differently in GA4 to provide a more accurate portrayal of when users should actually be considered as "Bounced." Refer to the examples below to see how Bounce Rate differs between UA and GA4:

Example	UA	GA4
User spends 5 seconds on 1 page then leaves	BOUNCED	NOT ENGAGED
User spends 5 minutes on 1 page then leaves	BOUNCED	ENGAGED
Users spends 5 minutes on 1 page, then taps phone call	BOUNCED	ENGAGED
User visits 2 pages then leaves	NO BOUNCE	ENGAGED

What does a healthy **Engagement Rate** look like?

For B2B brands, aim for 63% or above. For B2C brands, aim for 71% or above. However, engagement rates can also vary depending on your industry. Here are typical engagement rates per industry:

Industry	Avg. Engagement Rate
Automotive	62%
SaaS	61%
Commercial Insurance	63%
Construction	64%
eCommerce	83%
Entertainment	68%
Financial Services	76%
Higher Education	71%

Source: FirstPageSage

How can **Engaged Sessions Per User** help determine if a marketing activity is effective?

For brands whose customers typically have longer journeys to conversion, Engaged Sessions Per User may represent a key indicator for a ripening audience. As users frequently re-engage with your website, their likelihood of converting also increases. Engaged Sessions Per User can also help brands determine if their retargeting campaigns are effectively cycling users through the consideration stage of the marketing funnel.

What exactly are Events?

Events represent a wide variety of user interactions or occurrences on your website or app. For example, when a user clicks a link, completes a purchase, or even scrolls down a page—these actions are all classified as events. GA4 offers the flexibility to create custom events, so you can track interactions that might be unique to your website and discover deeper insights about consumer behavior.

How can Event Count Per User help determine if a marketing activity is effective?

We've found that an increase in Event Count Per User is typically associated with higher converting audiences. Among other uses, this metric may be helpful in determining if the latest website optimizations actually prompted increased engagement in a given audience.

Predictive Metrics

GA4's machine learning capabilities introduce predictive metrics that can identify the likelihood of a consumer behavior within the next 7 to 28 days. These metrics can help you create audience segmentations that can be targeted depending on the marketing agenda. Though some technical knowledge might be required to properly set up these audiences, here is an overview of the metrics and a breakdown of where to get started:

New Metric	Description
Purchase Probability	The probability that a recently active user will purchase in the next 7 days.
Churn Probability	The probability that a recently active user will churn (not engage with your website) in the next 7 days.
Predicted Revenue	The total revenue expected in the next 28 days from a recently active user.

How can I leverage Predictive Metrics to create audience segmentations?

You can build predictive audiences by navigating to Admin > Audiences > New Audience > Predictive and then selecting which type of audience you'd like to build.

What can I expect from these audience segmentations?

After you create an audience segmentation from predictive metrics, you can leverage the data within your retargeting campaigns. For example, if you plan to re-engage an audience that has a higher likelihood to churn, then consider targeting this audience with ads that will provide a strong incentive for the user to return. This allows for your advertising spend to be maximized on audiences that need the additional incentive, while excluding audiences that are already active on your website and intend to convert.

Saving Data From Universal Analytics

Since UA and GA4 use completely different models for collecting data, it's impossible to merge your historical data into GA4. However, it is possible to save your data from UA for future reference. There are a few ways to export your data, including:

1. Manually export by creating Google Sheets or PDF's from each report
2. Export using Dev Tools: Query Explorer
3. Use BigQuery Export (Google Analytics 360 Customers)

[How To Export Data From UA](#)

Set Up: Tracking

Improved Cross-Device Tracking

GA4 vastly improves upon the integration of mobile app data alongside traditional website tracking within a single property. This is a game-changer for businesses that operate across both web and mobile platforms.

Now, website and app owners can gain a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of their user behavior. They can easily see how customers navigate across their platforms, track the customer journey from start to finish, and understand how users switch between platforms. This holistic view enables businesses to create more seamless user experiences, make more informed decisions, and optimize their strategies for better engagement and conversion.

Conversion Tracking With Custom Events

In GA4, all user interactions—including those we would deem as conversions—are now classified as events. The complexity lies in teaching GA4 that some events are more important than others.

How can I set up Conversion Tracking With Custom Events in GA4?

Since GA4's data collection model provides event data (not destination data), you'll need to set up conversions by creating a custom event. These custom events identify incoming signals from the user to determine when an occurrence should be marked as a conversion. Follow the steps below to get started:

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Step 1

Access Admin > Events page, and click on Create Event.

Step 2

Name the custom event (ie. `thankyou_page_visit`).

Step 3

Configure the Matching Conditions with events that will specify when your conversion is triggered.

The screenshot shows the 'Create event' configuration interface. It is divided into two main sections: 'Configuration' and 'Matching conditions'.

Configuration:

- Custom event name: `thankyou_page_visit`

Matching conditions:

Create a custom event when another event matches ALL of the following conditions

Parameter	Operator	Value
<code>event_name</code>	equals	<code>page_view</code>
<code>page_location</code>	contains	<code>/thank-you/</code>

You can also utilize Google Tag Manager to create conversion events in GA4. This tool is especially helpful for setting up conversions that require technical triggers to operate.

[Conversion Set Up Walkthrough](#)

Automatically Migrate Goals From UA

GA4 does allow for you to migrate your goals (conversions) from UA with a fairly simple process that might save you the headache of manual conversion setup. Please note that not all goals from UA may transfer over as conversions in GA4—such as duration goals. These will require manual set up.

How do I access GA4's Goal Migration tool?

Step 1

Navigate to the *Property* column, and click **Setup Assistant**. Note: You need to be an Editor.

Step 2

Under *Property Settings*, go to *Set Up Conversions* and click the Actions (->) icon.

Step 3

Click **Import from Universal Analytics**.

Step 4

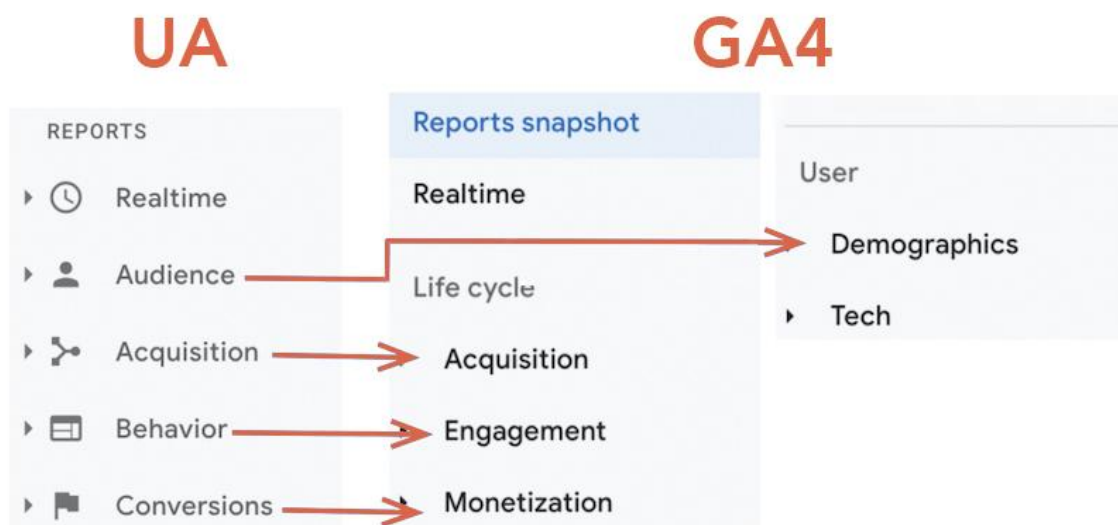
Click **Import Selected Conversions** in the top right.

[Goal Migration Tool Help](#)

Custom Dashboard: Reports

New Reporting Interface

The new reporting interface in GA4 renames or replaces most of the reports found in UA. The graphic below provides a simplified comparison of where you might locate the same type of reports between UA and GA4:



Customizing Reports

If you're not satisfied with GA4's reports, we recommend creating your own reports with hand-selected metrics. You can do this by clicking **Reports** and then navigating to the **Library** tab in the bottom left corner. Alternatively, you can just customize GA4's reports to your liking:

Choose A Report

Navigate to the "Reports" section of your GA4 account and select the report you want to customize from the left-hand menu.

Customize The Report

Click on the "Customize" button at the top right of the report. Here you can add in or remove reported metrics and dimensions, allowing you to customize the report to your preferences.

Save The Report

Make sure to click the "Save" button at the top right of the report once you are finished.

Building Reports With UA Familiarity

If some of your most beloved reports from UA have seemingly disappeared in GA4, then you can always customize your reports to regain access to missed features.

How can I see a **Source / Medium** dimension in GA4?

Accessing the Source / Medium dimension is fairly simple! You can view the dimension in the Acquisition Reports section under the User or Traffic Reports. You can click the dimension dropdown to select Source / Medium or if it's not there, add in via Report Customization feature.

- ▶ Examine user behavior

- Life cycle ^
- ▼ Acquisition
 - Acquisition overview
 - User acquisition: First user ...
 - Traffic acquisition
- ▶ Engagement
- ▶ Monetization
- Retention

- User ^
 - ▶ User Attributes
 - ▶ Tech

Session source / medium ▾ +

1	MaxConnect / Display
2	(direct) / (none)
3	google / organic
4	MaxConnect / Social
5	martechoutlook.com / referral
6	MaxConnect / Search
7	linkedin.com / referral

Kudos: Reporting Made Easier

Max Connect Digital's proprietary business intelligence platform, Kudos, leverages GA4's data to provide you easier access, yet deeper insights, to all of your favorite reports. And that's just the beginning.

[Discover Kudos Features](#)



Product Integrations: Enhanced Access

Improved Integration

GA4 boasts robust integration capabilities with a variety of other Google services, such as Google Ads, Google Merchant Center, and **BigQuery**, adding an extra layer of convenience and functionality for businesses using these platforms.

What is **BigQuery** and why should I care?

BigQuery, a serverless, highly scalable, and cost-effective multi-cloud data warehouse, is one such service that integrates seamlessly with GA4. Previously, access to BigQuery was limited only to those with a Google Analytics 360 account, a premium version of the service. However, with the advent of GA4, this barrier has been lifted. All GA4 users now have free access to BigQuery's powerful data analysis features. This integration allows businesses to store, process, and analyze vast amounts of data in real-time, ensuring they are always up-to-date and ready to adapt to changes.

[BigQuery Set Up Guide](#)

Enhanced Google Ads Features

Another significant aspect of GA4 is its integration with Google Ads, a key tool for businesses running paid advertising campaigns. GA4 enhances the functionality of Google Ads by enabling businesses to identify highly engaged or high-value audiences based on their interactions with the website or app. These audiences can then be targeted with personalized ads to boost conversions.

Moreover, GA4 provides the ability to view your Google Ads campaign data directly in the acquisitions report, offering a convenient way to monitor campaign performance. In addition, you can import analytics conversions into your Google Ads account, further improving your ability to measure the effectiveness of your ad campaigns.

[Google Ad Manager Integration](#)

GA4 Checklist: Make The Switch

Quick Start Guide

In order of priority, here are some mandatory items to get you started with GA4. Refer to the table of contents to learn more about any given checklist item:

<input type="checkbox"/> Verify that website is tagging GA4 (via Google Tag Manager)
<input type="checkbox"/> Under <i>Admin</i>, verify that the data stream is working for the GA4 property
<input type="checkbox"/> Set up applicable Google Products
<input type="checkbox"/> Search Console
<input type="checkbox"/> Merchant Center
<input type="checkbox"/> BigQuery
<input type="checkbox"/> Enable <i>Google Signals Data Collection</i> for more data about your traffic
<input type="checkbox"/> Navigate to Admin > Data Settings > Data Collection > Turn on Google signals
<input type="checkbox"/> Configure your attribution settings
<input type="checkbox"/> Under Attribution model, select <i>Cross-Channel Data-Driven</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Under Look-back window, select <i>Maximum Time</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Verify Conversions are set up under <i>Events</i> section

- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mark relevant events as conversions and/or create custom events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use Goal Migrations Tool to import conversions from UA |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Create or customize GA4 Reports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Explore the default report templates and customize as needed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Create custom reports that offer insights to unique business objectives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set Up Google Consent Mode to allow GA4 to model data lost to users that decline cookies |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about GA4 and UA differences in collecting data and calculating metrics |