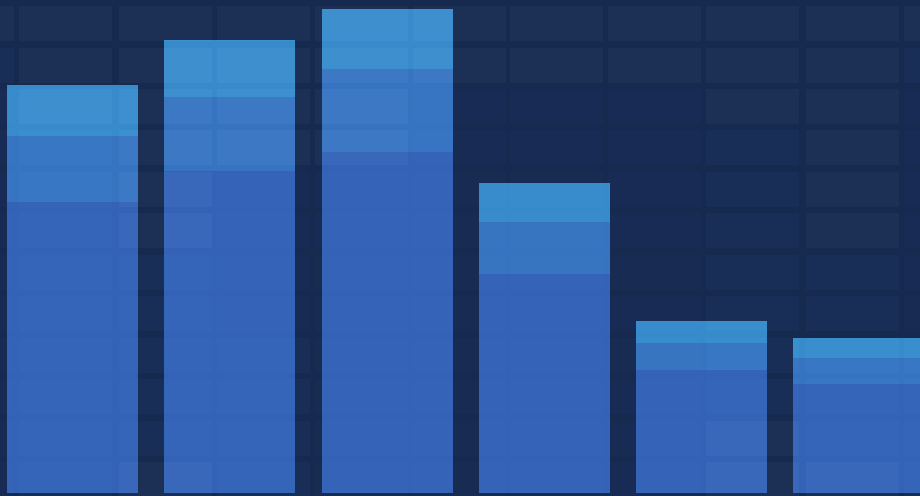


THE COMPLETE GUIDE

GA4 for Marketing Reporting



Overview

In a survey of marketing professionals, over [43% of respondents chose Google Analytics](#) as their number one choice for reporting.

It's been a core tool for marketers for years without many significant changes. Every day, digital marketers check in to the same reports, monitor the same metrics, and report on the same conversions. That is, until the announcement of the transition from Universal Analytics to Google Analytics 4 (GA4) in 2022.

GA4 isn't the same Google Analytics we know and love. It's the Google Analytics we're begrudgingly getting to know better. In this guide, we'll validate your feelings of frustration with GA4 and give you the tools to turn roadblocks into opportunities.

Timeline

- **2005**
Urchin from Google
- **2007**
Classic Google Analytics
- **2012**
Universal Analytics
- **OCTOBER 2020**
GA4 transition announcement
- **JULY 2023**
Universal Analytics sunset date
- **THE FUTURE**
Google Analytics 4

Reference: [History of Google Analytics by Luis Franco and Mayra Valdés](#)

Contents

4 Moving Past Universal Analytics (UA) and Living with GA4

7 How to See Where Your Site Visitors Are Coming From

10 How to See What Your Site Visitors Are Doing
Event Tracking in GA4

13 Choosing the Right Conversions for Your Measurement Strategy
How do you track a phone call in Google Analytics?

15 Preparing for Your Future with GA4

Moving Past Universal Analytics (UA) and Living with GA4

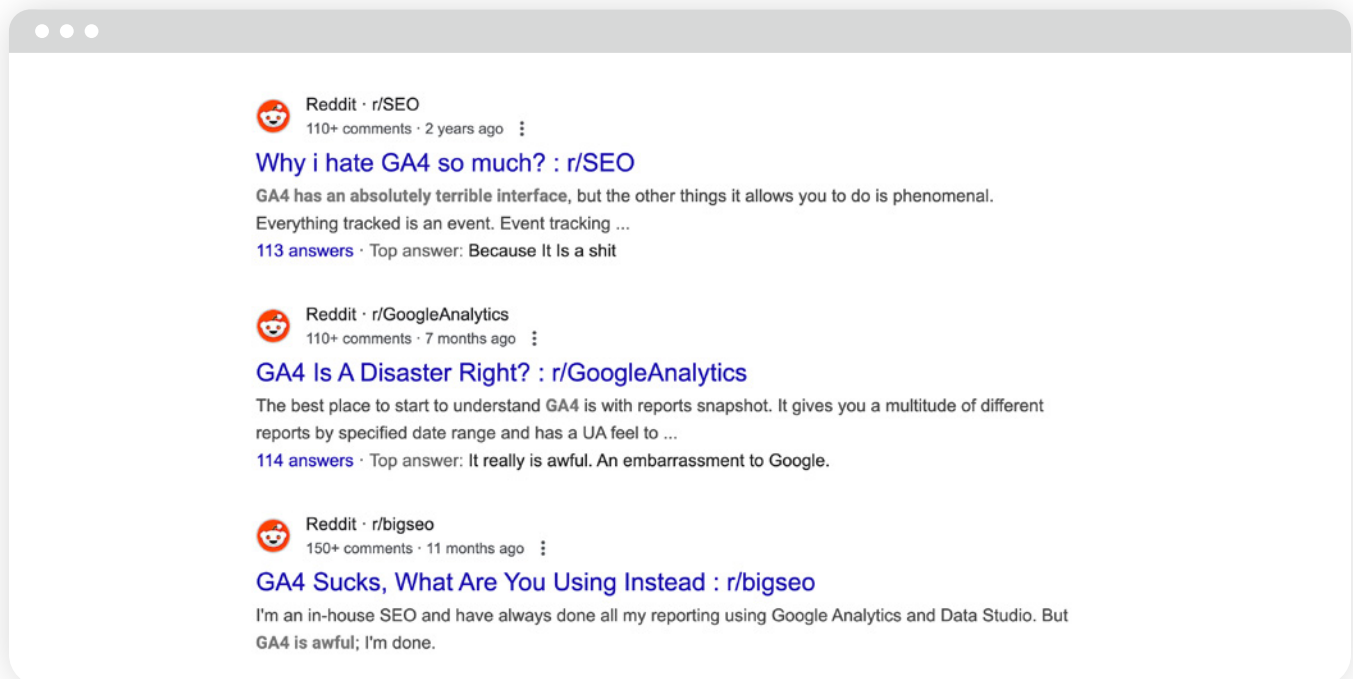
Before 2023, you used Google Analytics to report on website activity, engagement, and other online metrics.

Post-2023, you're still using Google Analytics to report on website activity, engagement, and other online metrics. It's the same end goal, so why are we still struggling with GA4 years after launch? Is it really that different from UA?

It absolutely is.

The changes range from cosmetic updates to foundational definitions of long-used metrics. There are also more lofty, future-facing adjustments, including a focus on privacy. With so many changes and "improvements", marketers everywhere have spent the last few years praising the new GA4!

[Narrator] They have not.



We don't like it. But we are sticking with it. Why? It's free and *mostly* does what we want it to do.

Quick hit: Why are we using web analytics like GA4 at all?

WE WANT TO...	TO...	SO WE CAN...
see where site visitors are coming from	measure success of marketing campaigns	get more visitors
find out what those visitors are doing on the site	make changes to the website	get them to do what we want them to
answer our boss' questions	make them happy	get promoted

How to See Where Your Site Visitors Are Coming From

This has stayed relatively consistent through the Google Analytics iterations. Assuming nobody on your team has completely customized your GA4 layout (which is possible, and one of the cool things we actually like about GA4!), you'll want to look at the Acquisition reports.

There are two main ways to view the "where" a visitor came from:

- User acquisition
- Traffic acquisition

User acquisition reporting answers the question "what brought this person to our site the first time,"...or as far back as GA4 knows about.

The traffic acquisition report answers the question, "what brought that person to our site each time they visited?" It's a small, but significant difference between "user-scoped" and "session-scoped".

One user can have multiple sessions.


One session can't have multiple users, *although it is fun to picture a buying group holding hands while navigating your site.*

HOW DO THEY KNOW WHERE A USER IS COMING FROM??

It's not magic, it's URLs and UTMs! Google looks at the URL when a user lands on your site for extra parameters. Things like `utm_source=google` or `gclid=123456789`. And they [bucket your site visitors](#) accordingly.

Take action!

If a channel you're spending a lot of money on isn't producing many visitors...consider making budget changes, creative changes, or ignore it because direct visitors aren't the true goal of that campaign.



.../?utm_source=google

How to See What Your Site Visitors Are Doing

You know what's cooler than a site visitor? A site visitor who likes your site enough to look around, maybe download something, call your sales team, or add an item to their cart for purchase. Before you can report on what your visitors are doing, you have to tell GA4 what to track.

Enter: events.

Event Tracking in GA4

[Events in GA4 are king.](#) Everything is tracked through events. If you're used to the Universal Analytics model of events, you'll find GA4's events to be much more flexible.

To start, gone is the old structure of an event:

- Event category
- Event action
- Event label

Instead, GA4 offers you an event_name and 25 slots to add parameters instead of the three of days past. 25 ways to slice and dice your events for analysis and reporting. This type of flexibility didn't exist in Universal Analytics and allows marketers to truly tailor their measurement strategy.



HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE BEST PARAMETERS?

Ask yourself, "What questions am I often asked about this event?" You'll automatically get the page_location and page_title to answer where the events happen.







But maybe you need to know how many times the event is triggered by customers. You could include a customer_id or other indicator.

Or do you need to know how many users began checkouts, broken out by product type? You could include product details like item_category and price.

If that sounds like a lot of work, there's some more good news about GA4. Some events get collected automatically. There are over [40 automatic events](#) to help monitor the engagement across your websites and apps in GA4. There's no need to worry about setting up specific event tracking for things like page views, file downloads, clicks to external sites, and even form submissions and scrolling.

The only step required to begin tracking these events is to install the base tag for GA4. If your data stream is pulling in data, you've got some events to start analyzing. There's also a quick toggle to switch on for enhanced event measurement.

Enhanced measurement

-  Page views
-  Scrolls
-  Site search
-  File downloads
-  Video engagement
-  Outbound clicks

Setting Up Custom Events in Google Analytics 4

For those events not lucky enough to be collected automatically, or for those unique to your team's strategy, there are options. There are a few ways to add your spin to events in GA4:

1. Set them up directly in the GA4 interface:

To create your event within GA4, navigate to "Configure" in the left-hand navigation, then "Events", and finally click on the "Create Event" button. Enter your chosen event_name, and then start adding parameters you'd like to associate with your event.

2. Use Google Tag Manager (GTM):

In GTM, you'll need to set up a "tag" for each custom event you'd like to track, a trigger to determine when to send that event, and any variables necessary to populate your parameters. An example tag that might be used to track button clicks across your site:

Tag Configuration

Tag Type

Google Analytics: GA4 Event
Google Marketing Platform

Configuration Tag

GA4 - Configuration - All Pages

Event Name

cta_click

Event Parameters

Parameter Name	Value
click_text	{{Click Text}}
click_destination	{{Click URL}}
click_color	{{Click Color}}

Add Row

Then, once the tag is set, you need a “trigger” to determine when to send the event. You can choose between page views, clicks, user engagements, or any other custom triggers. For our example, we’ll select clicks as our trigger type, and then tailor it to only fire on CTA buttons on the site.

Trigger Configuration

Trigger Type

Click - Just Links

Wait for Tags

Check Validation

This trigger fires on

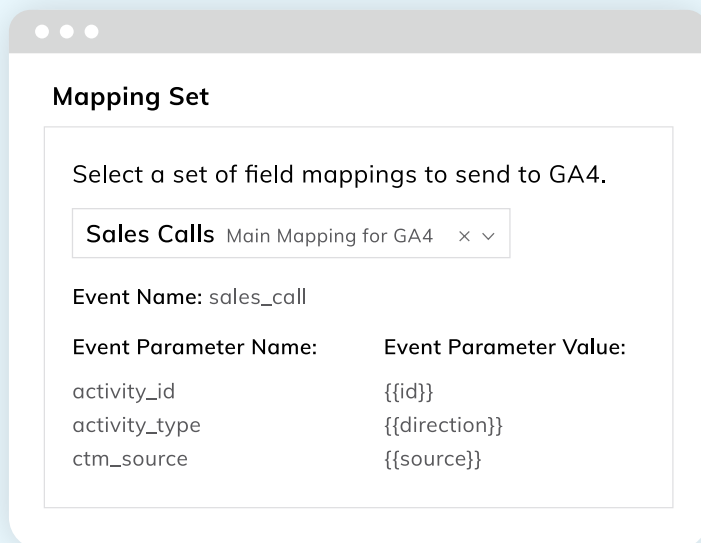
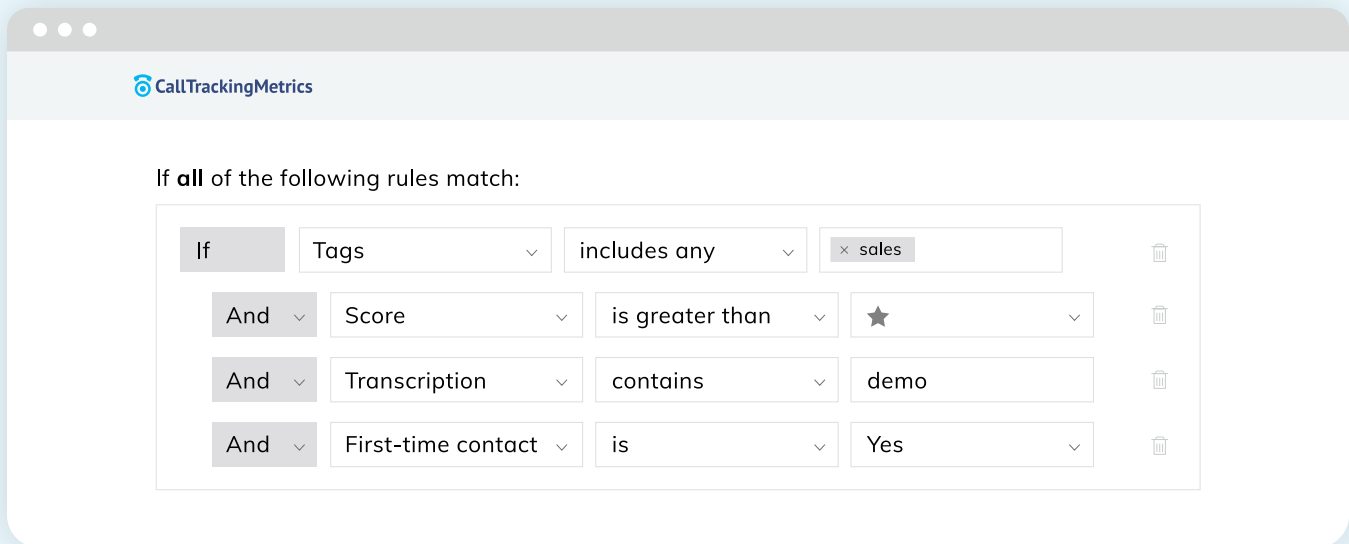
All Link Clicks Some Link Clicks

Fire this trigger when an Event occurs and all of these conditions are true

Click Classes contains cta

3. Sync third-party tools through integrations:

Every integration will have its process for setting up events in GA4. The common denominator will be that events are sent using Google's API. For a vendor like CTM, the process is very similar and offers the same level of flexibility as Google Tag Manager. You'll set a trigger to define when the event is sent to GA4 and map CTM fields to corresponding parameters in GA4. An example trigger and mapping set could look like this in CTM:



Limits to keep in mind!

- Event names cannot be longer than 40 characters
- 25 parameters per event
- 50 custom event-scoped dimensions
- 50 custom metrics
- Unlimited distinctly named events

More [limitations to know from Google support](#).

Choosing the Right Conversions for your Measurement Strategy

The number of events you can send to GA4 is unlimited. **So go wild.**

Include everything under the sun if you'd like. There's no data quite like more data. But, for conversions, it's a different story. GA4 limits you to 30 conversions, or 'key events' if you prefer Google's terminology.

30 is a lot, but you still need to think strategically about how you'll work within the limitations. You want to make sure you're covering all your bases and capturing the data that accurately reflects what success looks like for your website, team, and organization.

Is my website doing its job, and how can it be doing its job better?

Those questions are at the heart of any web analytics platform, including Google Analytics 4. For a lot of customers we work with, the role of the website is to drive leads and/or sales. If your website's job is to drive leads and sales, your conversion strategy needs to define what leads and sales are.

Examples of lead conversions might be:

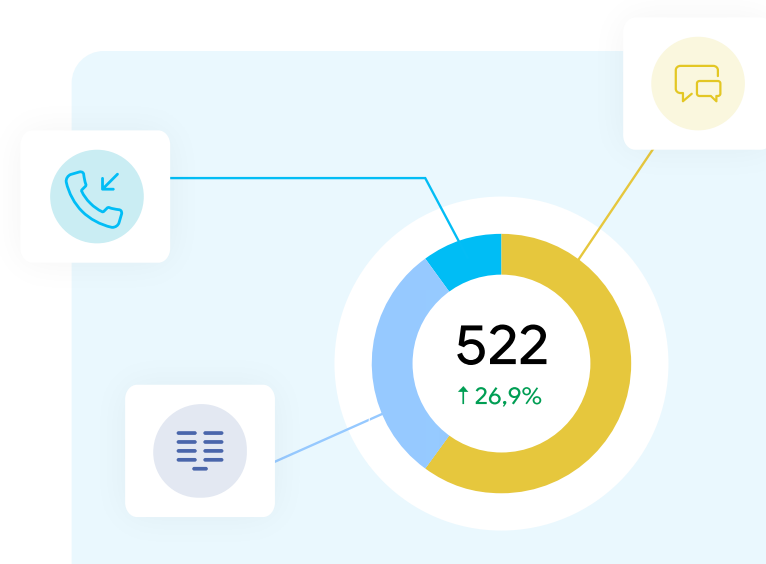
- Form submissions
- Phone calls
- Email submission through live chat
- A text message
- Starting a free trial

Examples of sale conversions might be:

- eCommerce transaction
- Converted phone call

Sneak peek at CTM's key events:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| — Begin Checkout | — Purchase |
| — Chat qualified lead | — Sales call |
| — Demo request | — Interactive demo |
| — Newsletter signup | lead |



You will likely need to customize and segment each of these to suit your site. Not all form submissions likely qualify as "leads" for your team. When setting up your conversions in GA4, get specific. You might want to track all "form submissions" as an event, but you'll also want to set up a separate event for demo requests or requests for contact if there's a variety of forms across your properties.

The automotive industry leading by example

The Automotive Standards Council (ASC) for GA4 was established to get dealerships, manufacturers, agencies, and other vendors on the same page about defining Google Analytics events.

Check out how the auto industry is handling GA4 events:

[Avoid Messy GA4 Reports for Auto Dealers](#)



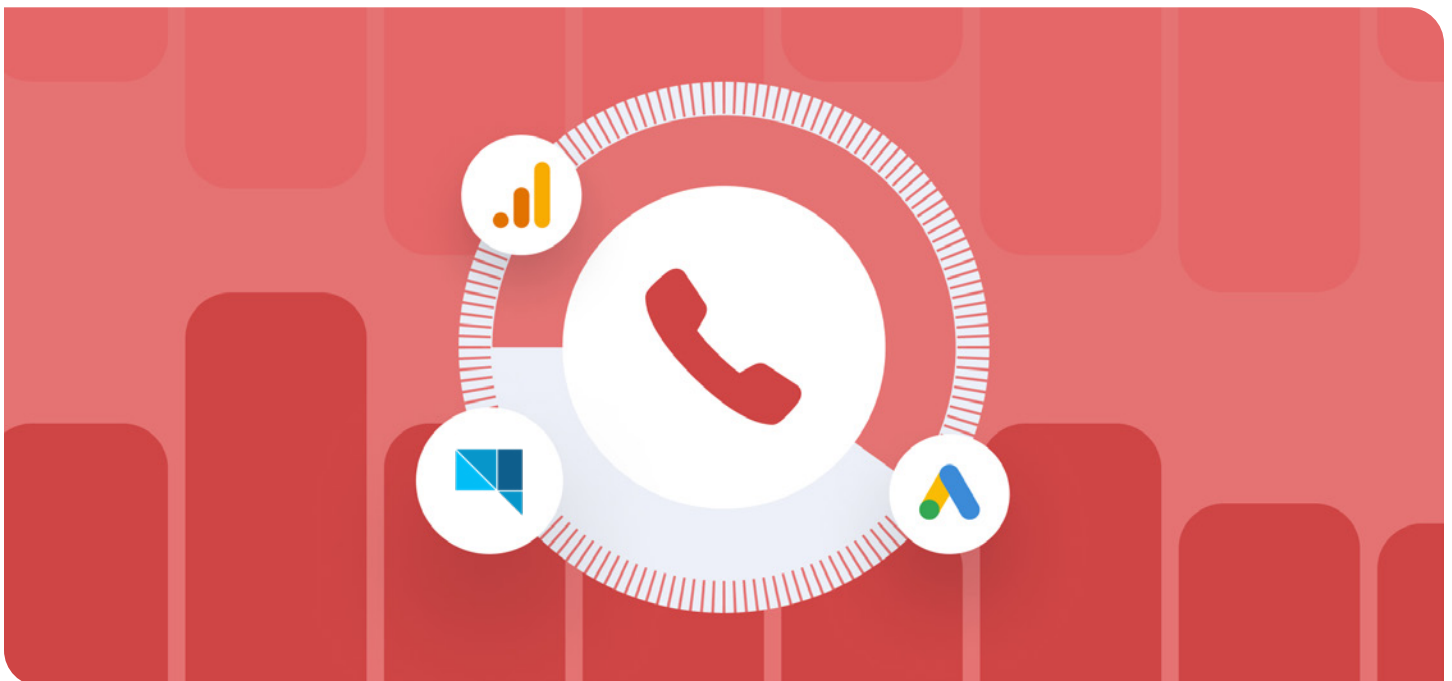
How do you track a phone call in Google Analytics?

You want to paint the full picture of how marketing and your website are impacting the business, which means including non-obvious conversions like a text message generated from a site session. How do you do that?!

1. Basic call tracking by setting up an event to track how many site visitors click on your phone number.
 - a. Set it up similar to a click event trigger: click URL contains `tel`
 - b. This will get you an estimated count of callers driven by your site.
 - c. Being based on clicks, it misses calls from people manually dialing (like desktop users) and doesn't give any insights into whether a call was connected, answered, or successful.
2. With a call tracking provider like CTM, which has an integration with GA4.

When working with a call tracking provider, you're getting much more context and insights from your calls beyond simple volume metrics. Modern call tracking, with dynamic number insertion, is used by agencies and their clients to attribute offline conversions to their online sources for more informed reporting.

We looked at how over 2,000 CTM accounts define their call GA4 conversions. Dig into [Google call conversions by the numbers](#).



We get it, everything's an event. How do we use those events to make decisions?

Key events define what you want your visitors to do on your site. Your job when analyzing GA4 reports is to look at how often visitors are sticking to your plan. If they're sticking to the plan, you're looking for little changes to test to make the experience even smoother. If they're not sticking to the plan, you're looking for opportunities to change messaging, visuals, internal linking, and CTAs.

OVERALL SITE CONVERSION RATE (KEY EVENT RATE):

Is your website, as a whole, delivering results? Total key events / total sessions will give you a starting point for deeper analysis.

- You'll be tempted to Google "what's a good site conversion rate", but unless you have the exact same key events as everyone else, nobody can tell you what your site's rate should be. Under .5%? You likely have some work to do. Just try to improve your number, not look to reach somebody else's.
- Use site conversion rates to look for optimizations to site structure, CTAs, and overall positioning.

PAGE CONVERSION RATE:

A more drilled down version of site conversion rate is the rate for a specific page. Are users taking the action you want them to take on this page?

- Use page conversion rates to find optimizations in messaging, CTAs, and page layout.
 - Make it clear which CTA is important for the page.
 - Describe the benefit of taking that action now, and give them a reason to trust you know what you're talking about.

CONVERSION RATES BY CHANNEL:

Looking back at the acquisition reports after building out your events will give you new insights into the outcomes of your marketing efforts. It's no longer only about the volume of visitors from each channel, but how likely each channel is to drive revenue through key events.

FUNNELS:

Not all pages are designed to capture a key event. Some are just steps along the path to a future key event. Looking at the various pages visitors view between showing up on your site and the key event opens a door for user flow optimization.

- Nobody is looking at the case studies you spent hours and hours on before signing up for your service. Is there an opportunity to give more visibility to them with more prominent links? Or can you save time on creating them because they're not useful to your buyers? (It's likely the first one, your case studies are great!)

Customizing your Report Experience

The frustrating part of GA4 is that it's largely a blank slate. The best part of GA4? It's a blank slate. There's so much room for marketers to put their spin on their measurement strategy and tailor the experience to the burning questions they regularly face.

The standard, out-of-the-box reporting is just a starting point waiting for customization and tweaks. Don't like the name "Monetization"? You can change it. Demographics not important to your everyday analysis? Remove it from the navigation.

There's a "Library" link at the bottom of the reports column where you can build, modify, and remove collections of reports. Those collections appear in the navigation, and the reports appear in the collections. You're able to modify names, dimensions, metrics, and more to give you and your team as much value as possible at a glance.

Use "Explore" for Deeper Analysis

If completely personalized standard reports weren't enough, the "Explore" tab opens up even more possibilities for your ongoing and ad hoc analysis. Need to see the data sliced and diced in a lot of different ways? Building in Explore is likely where you'll want to be.

Standard reports will give you your consistent reporting, the things you monitor on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Explore allows you to dig deeper to troubleshoot, test hypotheses, build segments for comparative analysis, or just have fun wading through your data.

If that's not enough flexibility, or you want to consolidate your web analytics with other marketing data sources, GA4 is compatible with Google's Looker Studio (formerly Data Studio). Looker has even more functionality and ability to customize a dashboard, great for internal reporting to leadership or external reporting for clients.

I'm not seeing it in my reports!

When you set up custom events, you'll need to create a "custom dimension" for any brand new parameters you'll want included in permanent reports. Keep in mind there's a limit of 50 custom dimensions.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS:

- Check real-time reports or the debug report in admin to view the parameters as they're being sent.
- Account for lag in the data. Many GA4 users experience longer delays in data appearing in reports. It's not there the same day? Try again tomorrow.



Download: [Guide to Marketing Reporting with Looker Studio](#)

Preparing for Your Future with GA4

GA4 is not a set it and forget it tool. You probably weren't tracking traffic from AI sources when you first built out your GA4 account.

But now? Of course you are. :)

Your online measurement should reflect the goals of your organization, which aren't static. Think through what you need now, what you think you'll need soon, and brainstorm what kinds of metrics you'll need in 3, 5, 10 years.

There's no pressure to be a Google Analytics 4 expert on day one. Even Google continues to make regular changes to GA4 based on critical feedback from users. Nobody gets it right without some testing.

To do today:

- Log in to your GA4 property
- Check to see if the data stream is pulling in data

To do next:

- Start mapping your company's goals to events, key events, and audiences
- Brainstorm all the new things you can accomplish with GA4's flexibility
- Add call tracking to your measurement strategy
- Impress your leadership and clients with your improved reporting

