

# Taming the tech titan:

## Navigating the pros and cons of GA4

**We're now a few months into using Google Analytics 4 (GA4), and different teams within Denfield – from Data to PPC – have been harnessing the power of this new platform to help us guide our clients into making smarter business decisions.**

But for some users, it hasn't been a smooth road. Many clung to the predecessor, Universal Analytics (UA), until the point where data stopped recording on their websites – prompting them to reluctantly accept the reality of GA4 as their sole source of website data.

But what exactly caused so much reluctance to adopt GA4? Does it fall short in certain areas? Or was it just a case of users being too comfortable with UA? The latter is looking the most likely, given that UA had been with us for almost 18 years!

Google believed there's something more representative of what success (and failure) should look like moving forward. And so, they ripped the band-aid off...

Here's **our take** on the main changes and how users can make the most of this evolution in reporting.

### Adding the 'what' to the 'where' and 'when'

Firstly, GA4 moved away from a session-based data model to an event-based data model. Why? In session-based analytics, the sole focus is to track the volume of sessions and where the user is on your website.

Event-based analytics has the edge as it's able to focus on what the user is doing on your website in addition to the session data. The insights allow us to adapt to user habits, rather than pushing them through a sales funnel that doesn't feel natural to them.

“As data analysts, we absolutely live for discovering how our audience behaves as it allows us to model our analysis on either changing this behaviour or looking at amplifying it. These more detailed insights allow us to focus on the customer and how best to guide them through their digital journey.”

Michael Hillard, Digital Marketing Analyst & Strategist

## Filling the data gaps

Secondly, GA4 marked a departure from reliance on cookies in identifying and tracking sessions and devices. There's now a more enhanced measurement setup that combines traditional web cookies with machine learning algorithms. This is to allow Google to capture data even when cookies are unavailable or blocked. This, in turn, improves the accuracy of reporting, rather than merely designating more and more data as 'other' or 'unassigned', which previously hindered our review of channel and campaign performance.

## Adding engagement metrics

GA4 has replaced behaviour metrics (like bounce rate) with new engagement metrics to give you a more detailed analysis of user behaviour. These new metrics are based on 'engaged sessions', defined as: 'Sessions that lasted longer than 10 seconds, had a conversion event or had two or more screen- or pageviews.'

"In the shift to GA4, our KPIs have evolved to prioritise user engagement and meaningful interactions over superficial metrics. GA4 encourages a focus on quality interactions, such as user engagement and conversion events, providing a clearer picture of user behaviour and allowing for more precise marketing and content strategies. It's not just about traffic; it's about understanding and enhancing the quality of user interactions."

Mankirat Basi, Paid Search Executive

## A new era

On paper, these changes all sound perfect for understanding our audience better and identifying how we can build a larger, more engaged audience. But, as with any new software, some of the struggle lies in translating the data – everything looks familiar, but things aren't quite in the same place as where you left them.

We're also a little bit in limbo, as previously we'd work on year-on-year performance reviews or quarterly reviews. This isn't possible at present as we can't currently use these comparisons to give insight into whether performance has or hasn't improved. It's like comparing apples with pears.

However, the benefit of this is that it has encouraged proactive dialogue with our clients – to ensure they understand we're wiping the slate clean and also to discuss what KPIs we actually believe now best represent success in the future. This has enabled us to provide a new or even an alternative focus that we otherwise may never have considered.

## Let's Go. Do. Four!

While there are undoubtedly some initial challenges, the pros certainly outweigh the cons – and we're certain that if we give GA4 as long a run as UA had, we'll be just as sad to see it go!

Despite the current feelings in the industry, it's a change we're more than happy to embrace if it means better results for our clients.

**Chat to us if you want to discuss GA4 and data reporting further!**