

The Downfalls of Google Analytics and Why We Still Use It

Google Analytics is great . . . to a point. Unfortunately, it has its faults and foibles, but we (mostly) love it anyways. Because despite its shortcomings, there are reasons we still use Google Analytics.

Where does Google Analytics fall short?

One of the worst things about Google Analytics, in my humble opinion, is its limitations. Yes, it is an AMAZING tool, but it has its limits. If the Google engineers could solve the problem of inaccurate bounce rate and session timeouts, I would bake them a cake every day.

Ghost spam is also a prevalent problem in Google Analytics, but that's really the case for just about any analytics program. Some smart cracker (yes, that's an accepted term for a malicious hacker) will always be there to find the chink in the armor and get through it. And guess who pays the price? Yep, you got it: us.

Google Analytics also offers so much information that it's easy to get overwhelmed or misinterpret the data. If you're new to Google Analytics, a lot of the data can't be taken at face value. For example, it may look like a whole slew of people are looking up your site directly in their address bar... when in reality, they're coming there through mobile social media sites, and the traffic isn't registering correctly. It can also be just plain misinterpreted: if you don't fully understand an aspect of a report, you may think it means something wildly different from reality.

Given that this is Google, one of the greatest and worst things about Google Analytics is the search results reports. The greatest thing would be the great data you can pull from these reports; the worst thing being that you will get a disproportionate amount of (*not set*) results that you may never be able to find out what they were. Anyone searching in the Firefox search field, Chrome's address bar/omnibox, and *anyone*

signed into Google, regardless of their browser, will show up as *(not set)*. This is mostly a privacy measure, which is honorable, but it makes it frustrating for anyone who is trying to use the data to improve their site.

Why do we still use Google Analytics, then?

Because it's the best thing we've got, frankly. It's free, it's relatively robust, and once you get the hang of it, it's easy to use. Most of the problems I outlined above are also reasonably fixable.

Bounce rate just needs to be better understood. Ghost spam is filterable, and there are some secret weapons that we can use to combat it. All of that information can be made palatable, and with some training, can be interpreted correctly. That mobile traffic that shows up as direct traffic can be tracked with UTM links. And those search results that get lost along the way? We can extrapolate at least some of the data, based on other aspects of the search reports.

The data in Google Analytics is easily manipulated. What I mean is that you can create your own reports, custom dashboards, segments, and all sorts of other fun goodies. A lot of other people will require you to present Google Analytics data, as well: advertisers, sponsors, etc. It's easier for them to trust a company like Google, rather than the data from your hosting company, even if it is accurate.

So, despite the downfalls of Google Analytics, it's still one of the best tools we have available to us as bloggers and entrepreneurs. Its accessibility and capabilities are why we return to it, even when it makes us mad. And as Google works on improving it, it will only get better!