

COLUMNS

## GA4: What retailers need to know

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Universal Analytics is being replaced by Google Analytics 4, which is a more advanced and well-rounded software tracking user behavior.

Google is sunsetting Universal Analytics for non-360 accounts July 1 to spur the industry to adopt GA4, which has been out of beta since 2020 and provides higher quality, more reliable data for marketers.

However, brands have been slow to adopt a GA4 strategy despite the risk of losing their year-over-year data once the switch becomes permanent.

### Switching costs

The general tone in the market about GA4 has not been positive at the end of 2022 leading into the first quarter of 2023.

Reasons for market negativity stem from the deadline of the switch especially considering GA4 is still not a completed product and the lack of availability of prebuilt connectors.

For example, Shopify, a platform with some 4.5 million-plus stores, rolled out its native integration in March. The quick rollout and several missing features and functionality have made switching from Universal Analytics to GA4 a tough sell.

A few months is barely long enough to implement the necessary changes to facilitate a smooth transition from one system to the other.

To prevent a gap in analytics, marketers must migrate to GA4 sooner rather than later. The imminent switch gives merchants a good reason to clean up their data by implementing consistent tracking templates, creating content groups, and building more detailed product categorization.

Merging historical data from Universal Analytics into a database on which to query for future reference is also recommended.

By the time UA is sunsetted, marketers must have historical critical business information to avoid mistakes and

critical data gaps.

Google is providing an automatic conversion to GA4, which claims it successfully converts UA events into GA4 events, But we highly recommend all merchants customize their installs to ensure tracking and data is accurate.

That said, more functionality will come with time as GA4 incorporates more features.

#### Eventful

Whereas UA properties were session-driven, GA4 is event driven with every action, including pageviews. No longer do you have Category/Action/Label/Value to set up events and subsequent conversions.

Since UA was entirely last-click attribution, it was harder to see the impact that higher funnel marketing channels such as paid social or display might be having on business performance.

GA4 allows a merchant to select from a variety of attribution models including the familiar last click as well as its data-driven modeling which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to determine the channel or campaign that had the most impact on conversion.

GA4 also allows merchants to pass user IDs for known or logged-in customers to track cross-device, and better understand marketing channels that tend to be highly mobile such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok.

Google has a list of recommended events and parameters for each event that merchants can configure on their website, such as PDP View or Add to Cart.

In addition to those custom events, merchants can expose up to 50 event-scoped custom dimensions and 25 user-scoped dimensions per GA4 property.

Using these data points, brands can use these custom dimensions to map beyond traditional fields for example, exposing a detailed product taxonomy/hierarchy for ecommerce brands or highlighting attributes about products such as the material of jewelry or the origin of a garment.

Despite the looming deadlines, many Web platforms do not provide out of the box support, requiring them to reach out to specialized firms to help with the setup/configuration of GA4.

Though the transition from UA to GA4 may seem daunting, the benefit of custom setup means that features that were rarely used in UA are now available to merchants including valuable dimensions such as content groupings or product hierarchies.

**MERCHANTS MUST EMBRACE** Google Analytics to preserve historical data and remain competitive in the online landscape.

Though they are hesitant to adopt GA4, the transition from UA is inevitable.

While adapting to a new way of reporting may take time and meticulous planning, merchants and marketers will find the new breadth and quality of data will change the way that they interact with consumers forever.

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