

Analytics and Privacy – Fall 2021 Update

“Research has shown that up to 52 companies can theoretically observe up to 91% of the average user’s web browsing history,” a senior Chrome engineer told a recent Internet Engineering Task Force call, “and 600 companies can observe at least 50%.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8sBCPYDHJo&t=21s>

You’ve seen the “accept cookies” pop-ups on more and more websites. You have undoubtedly heard about GDPR – the European Union’s extensive privacy laws that went into effect in May of 2018. California implemented similar privacy legislation in the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) in 2020.

As people increasingly “opt-out” of cookies, the data analytics that we have relied on to understand consumer behavior are becoming increasingly inaccurate. This spring, Apple iOS updates included a privacy-centric feature that requires an opt-in from users to permit software to track them – essentially gutting the ability of third-party cookies to accurately track mobile traffic. The latest iOS update included the ability for users to block pixels for emails. Your email contact manager will no longer be able to accurately track opens and clicks.

Safari and Firefox, two of the largest browsers, also no longer support third-party cookies.

What does this mean for your analytics? While we all can understand the need for privacy, small businesses may not be aware that these changes have an enormous impact on their ability to track campaigns and determine the success (or not) of their website efforts.

- Conversion rate data from ads seen in apps such as Facebook and LinkedIn will no longer be accurate.
- Geolocation targeting that uses GPS data collected from apps are no longer available.
- Retargeting audiences will shrink as will look-alike audiences.

Google’s Chrome and Analytics

Don’t do away with your Google Analytics just yet. Google’s Chrome is one of the lone standouts that still tracks and profiles users via cookies. They intended to leave the system behind in June of 2021, but the failure of their new system to adequately protect privacy while providing accurate information for Google’s Analytics has meant a delay in those plans.

For more about the problems of FLoC click here:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakdoffman/2021/08/28/stop-using-google-chrome-on-windows-10-android-and-apple-iphones-ipads-and-macs/amp/>

Google introduced Google Analytics 4 (GA4) in October of 2020 as a response to privacy laws and the changing needs of analytics. Both GA4 and Universal Analytics (UA) use cookies, but GA4 fills out data for traffic and user behavior without relying on individual “hits” to a page. It uses first-party data (from your business), Google “signals” (from users who have opted into ads personalization) and machine

learning to understand how people interact with your websites and apps. Individuals are assigned to cohorts based on similar interests and behaviors. GA4 uses the partial information it knows about individuals in the cohort to extrapolate behavior for the group.

How is Google Analytics 4 different than Universal Analytics (UA)?

These are just some of the ways the GA4 differs from UA:

- UA uses a session-based data model, GA4 is an event-based data model.
- GA features data streams instead of views and segments.
- GA4 focuses on a more complete view of the customer journey vs individual metrics across devices, pages, and segments.
- GA4 presents data in terms of events – user interactions with a website or app (page views, button clicks...).
- GA4 will allow marketers to edit and correct the way events are tracked in analytics without on-site code.

If you previously had a UA account, it will not be discontinued any time soon. However, as of Oct 14, 2020, all new Google Analytics accounts are GA4. You CAN have both types of accounts active and Keystone Click highly recommends that you open a GA4 account and start tracking your usual metrics in both account types so that you can start understanding the differences in the data. Here are instructions for setting up GA4 alongside your UA: <https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9744165?hl=en>

You should expect your data to look different because these two platforms are very different at their core data collection level. It will take some time to find the analogous reports to give you the answers you are looking for. That said, many advanced users are excited about the improvements to report building that are available in GA4

The increased push for privacy is having a huge impact on marketers' ability to track and assess digital outreach. Apple iOS, Bing, Safari, and Firefox (to name a few) are no longer passing the "cookies" that allow you to track users' behavior. People are opting out of sharing their information in increasing numbers. You need to view your data, especially any trend data, with the understanding of what it is missing.