Google Analytics™ Basics

for PR Professionals

Measure your PR Efforts for Maximum Impact

by Christopher S. Penn

SHIFT COMMUNICATIONS

The Mad Men Problem

Whether you know it or not, almost everyone in public relations has the same problem: the Mad Men problem. We're used to doing things, and we do things, but there isn't really necessarily an expectation that we're going to do things that have a measurable outcome.

This is how the PR industry has existed for over 100 years. We do things and go off of instinct a lot — and that modus operandi used to be just fine. In the past, this used to be more than enough to get results we wanted to make clients and stakeholders alike happy. What changed? The PR industry stayed here in the Mad Men era while the rest of the world went to the Jerry Maguire era — "Show me the money!"

In today's world, everyone wants to know how public relations is actually working. Clients ask - is it doing anything for my company? Are there any measurable benefits? This is where Google Analytics comes into play.

Google Analytics is an incredibly capable product to measure not just what is happening on a website, but all of your digital marketing inputs and outputs. If it's happening and it's measurable online, from mobile devices to tablets to desktops,
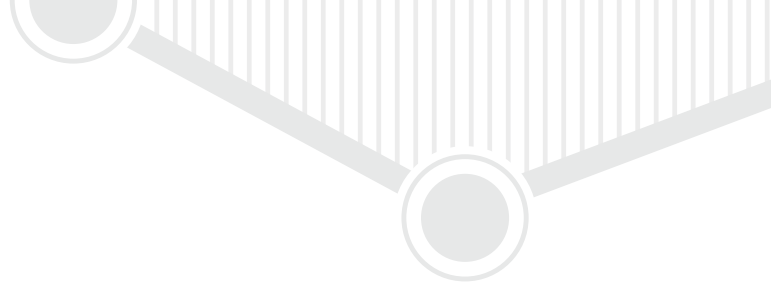
it's something you can (and should) be checking in on.

If you thought Google Analytics was just a way to see how many people visited your website, think again. It can measure your audience. It can measure lead generation. It can, with some clever wiring, integrate with a sales CRM or a marketing automation system to measure how often people are coming back from certain sales pages. It can even measure, to a degree, customer service by looking at how often people visit and later return to your website.

As we move through this eBook, we're going to assume two things. First, that you have access to Google Analytics. Second, that you have the ability to make changes based on what you find. If you have access to Google Analytics and no ability to make changes and improvements based on what you learn in the following pages, there will be little to gain!

Goals and Goal Values

Leads are important, there's no doubt about that. Sales are what keep your doors open. PR does not have the ability to directly impact sales. If you get a great story picked up or a social media influencer talks about your company, you have the opportunity to use them for testimonials, which will help advance sales by highlighting customer success stories, but that's not what public relations is really good at. Public relations is good at building audiences, and Google Analytics can help us find and define those audiences. Let's dive into how...
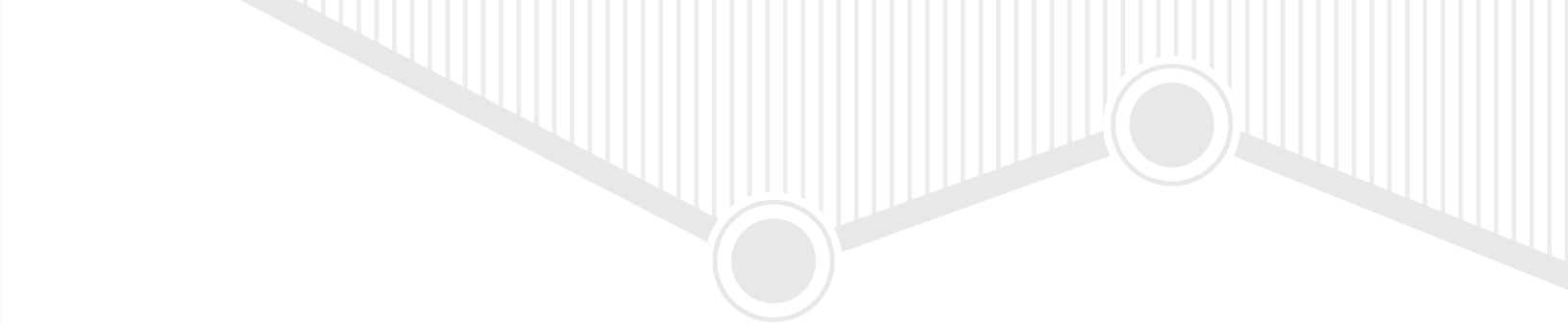
Figure 1
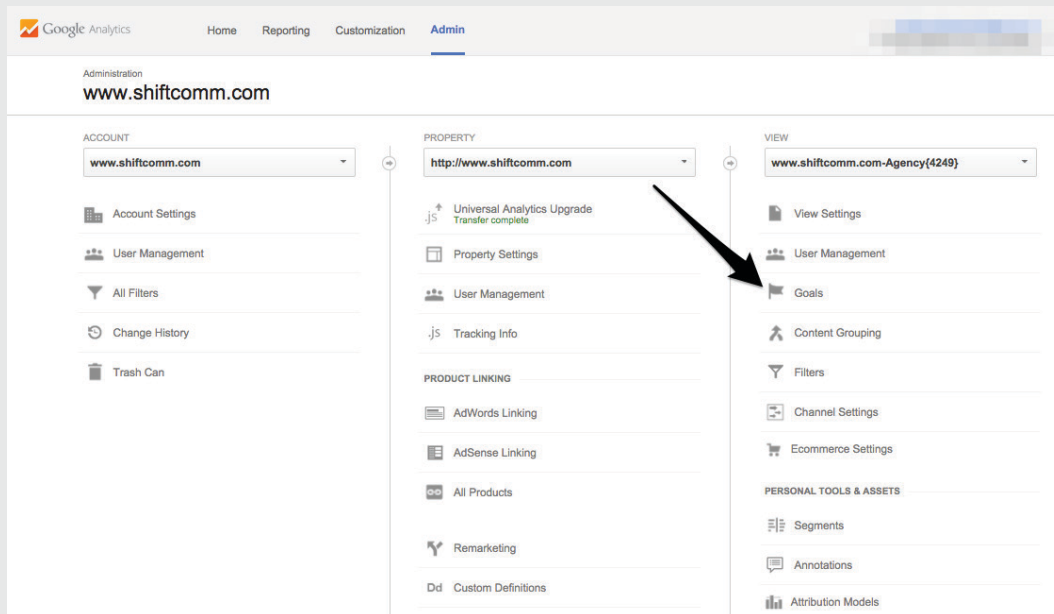
Figure 1

When you first log into Google Analytics, you want to start with the Admin tab. From there, let's start with goals [Figure 1].

If you don't have any goals set up in Google Analytics, you're doing it wrong. (Sorry if that was harsh...but the truth hurts sometimes!) Without goals, you are not using the application to its fullest potential. With goals and goal values, you can start to understand the value of the traffic you bring to your website.

Before you can set up a goal, you have to decide what actions people can take on your website that are of value. Do you want them to sign up for an appointment? Make a reservation? Buy something? Fill out a contact form? Google Analytics includes pre-built goals, or you can make your own.

There are four different ways to measure goals. The easiest one that is used most often on websites is 'destination.' This could be, for example, a thank you page users are directed to once they complete a contact form. Remember the page you downloaded this eBook from? That was a thank you page. There are some other things you can set up for goals, but we'll leave those for the not-so-basic course.

To create your goal, you need to first determine your destination (that thank you page we just talked about). The second step is determining the dollar value of the goal. If you're doing e-commerce and have something for sale, this part is easy —

the dollar value of the goal is simply whatever your product is worth. If you have a longer sales cycle, where your lead will eventually become a sale further down the line, you have to infer the value of the goal action. Here's an example…

Assume you have a website with a lead form, and it typically takes 100 people filling out the form in order for one sale to actually close. Let's also assume that your sale is worth $100. If we work backward, every lead is effectively worth $1.

Unfortunately, not every calculation is going to come out that cleanly. You'll have to do the math with your internal products and services to determine your goal values. Look at your mailing list. How many people from that list eventually converted? How many people from social media converted? Using all of this information, do the math to figure out the value of your lead when someone fills out a lead form.
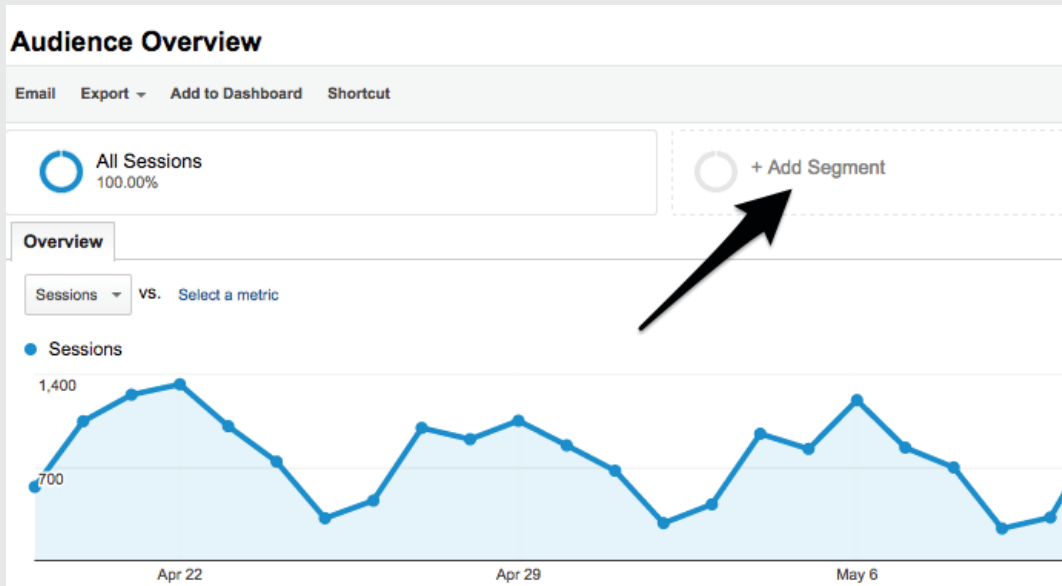
Setting up goals and goal values is important because it will change how we look at every other aspect of Google Analytics and start to give us ROI. Goals are also important to set up first because Google Analytics is never retroactive. If you start a campaign on the first of the month and wait to set up a goal to track the campaign until the tenth, you just lost ten days of data that Google can't go back and track. You can only look forward at the data.

Audiences

New and Returning Users

Google Analytics defines audiences in two parts — new and returning users. New users consists of people who are new to your website. Returning users are those who have been to your site before and have now visited again. Simple, right? Cool.

Figure 2

Audience Overview

Email   Export ▾   Add to Dashboard   Shortcut

○ All Sessions
100.00%

○ + Add Segment

Overview

Sessions ▾   VS.   Select a metric

● Sessions

1,400

700

Apr 22   Apr 29   May 6

To look at the number of new and returning users to your website, you use segments. From the audience overview, click on the "add segment" button [Figure 2].

In the new window, un-check "All Sessions" and select "New Users" and "Returning Users." Be sure to confirm your changes by clicking the blue "Apply" button. Now you can see on the graph the number of people who are new and the number of people who are returning, the users, the sessions (the number of times someone visited) and the number of pages visited.

As PR professionals, our job is new audiences. But, it just so happens that a lot of the content marketing that we do — a lot of the placed content, bylines, maybe a press release now and then — will also bring people back to the site who remembered the company or brand. While we want to see the number of new users go up consistently over time, we also want to see returning users going up. The idea is that if you're a new user, PR has done its job. But hopefully our work has also reminded you that if you've seen the brand before, you'll want to go back and see what's going on again.

Ideally, again because many brands and PR firms are now running social media and content marketing efforts, you're going to want to see returning users go up. New and returning users should be tracked in your reporting without a doubt. Don't focus so much on the percentages…focus on change over time. Did I get more new users this month than last month? If overall new users is not increasing

over time, someone will soon be knocking on your door saying, "Hey, I don't think you are doing your job."

Mobile, Mobile, Mobile

The second thing we want to understand about our audience is what sort of audience we have. There are all sorts of different measures available in Google Analytics, but the one we want to focus on is what devices people are using to access your website.

Still within the Audiences tab, click on "Mobile" and then, "Overview." If you've been following along in Google Analytics, be sure to set your segments back to show-ing "All Sessions" instead of new and returning users. Next, click on the pie chart image to change the table to a pie chart representation of the data [Figure 3].

We can now easily see the portions of sessions (remember, this is the number of times people visit your site) that occur on desktop computers, mobile phones or
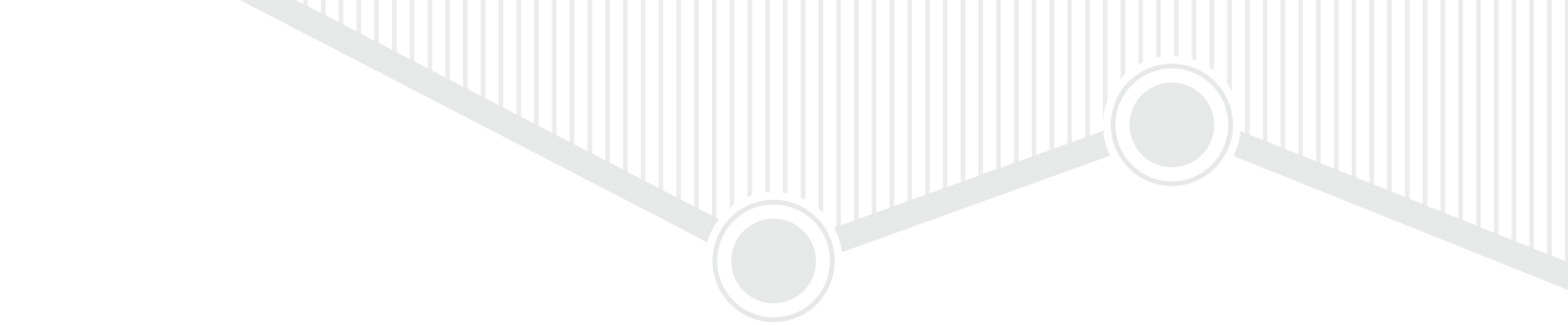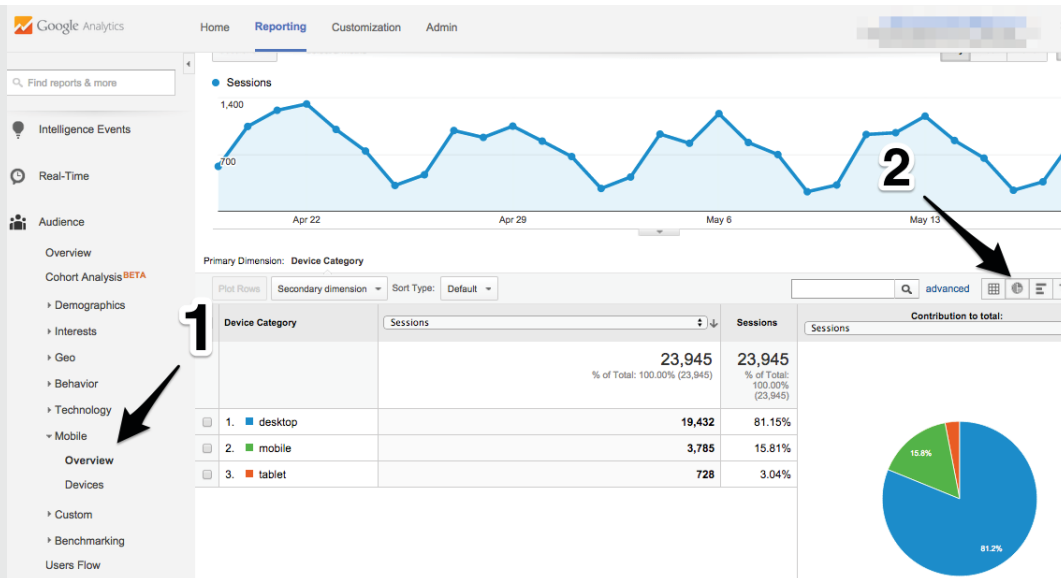

Figure 3

tablets. In the example above, roughly 1/5 of users visit the website via mobile phone or a tablet. What does this tell you? If your site is not mobile compatible, one out of every five people will be unable to visit. In the long run, that number can add up.

How does this impact PR? Think about the mobile device. The mobile device changes your behavior. If you search on a desktop for 'coffee shop,' you'll get what Google calls an "informational query." This includes anything from the history of coffee shops and where coffee shops began to local results. If you do the same search on a mobile device, however, you'll get what Google calls a "navigational query." Because of the device, Google assumes you want to know where the closest coffee shop is to where you're currently located. If you now know that more people are using navigational queries than they are informational queries, you may rethink spending time and resources on multiple infographics when what your customers really want to know is, "where are you?"

Understanding your website's mobile traffic is especially important because of a recent Google algorithm update that gives favor on mobile devices to websites that are mobile-friendly. Think you don't need a mobile strategy because only a small percentage of your traffic comes from mobile? Think again. All websites need a mobile strategy.

Acquisition

Referral Traffic

So far, we've covered new and returning users. We also understand how those users are visiting the site. Next up, we will discuss where these people are coming from and how our public relations efforts impact them.

Figure 4
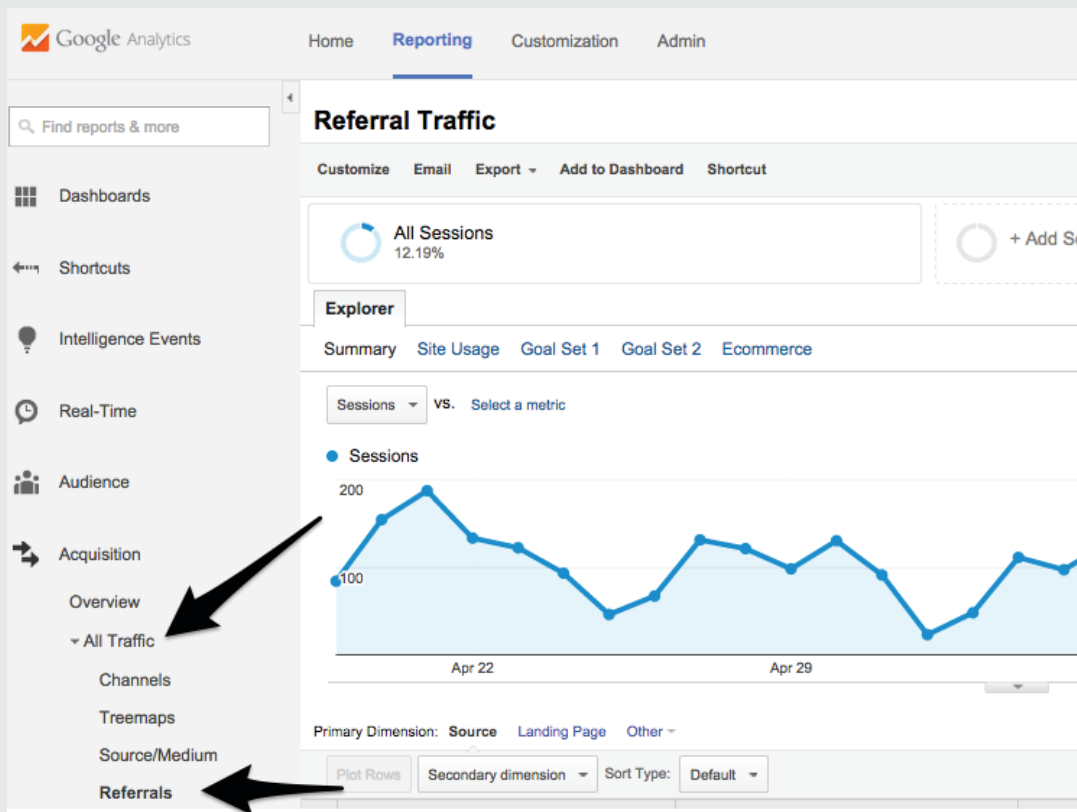
A "referral" in Google Analytics is the website that users come to your site from, not including social networks or search. If you're in PR, this is going to be the bread and butter of your entire existence. To start, let's look at "All Traffic Referrals" in the Acquisition tab [Figure 4].

Like we said, referrals is a page that PR pros need to be familiar with. From here, you can see what's not only generating traffic, but also what that traffic is worth. Remember those goals and goal values we set up? In the referral report, you can see what referral source drove the most revenue in terms of goal completions and goal values. Although generating sales is not the responsibility of public relations, you can still see just how much revenue was generated from one hit to the next.

As a brand, referrals are important because you can see not only which websites generated the most traffic, but also what that traffic is worth – what's actually moved the needle for you.

Referral traffic also has a secondary benefit for PR professionals. If you see a website or publication driving traffic to your website that you didn't go out and pitch, it could be an opportunity to work together. Whether it's a pitching or
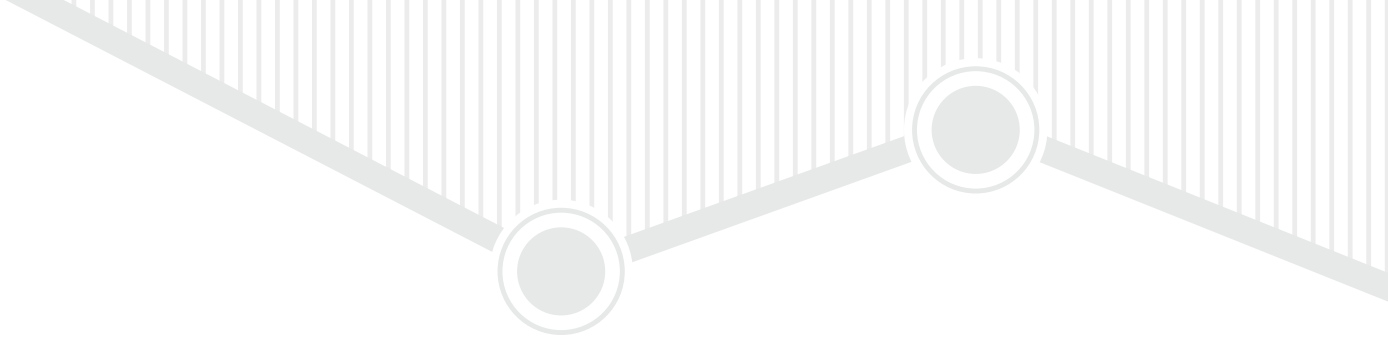
Figure 5
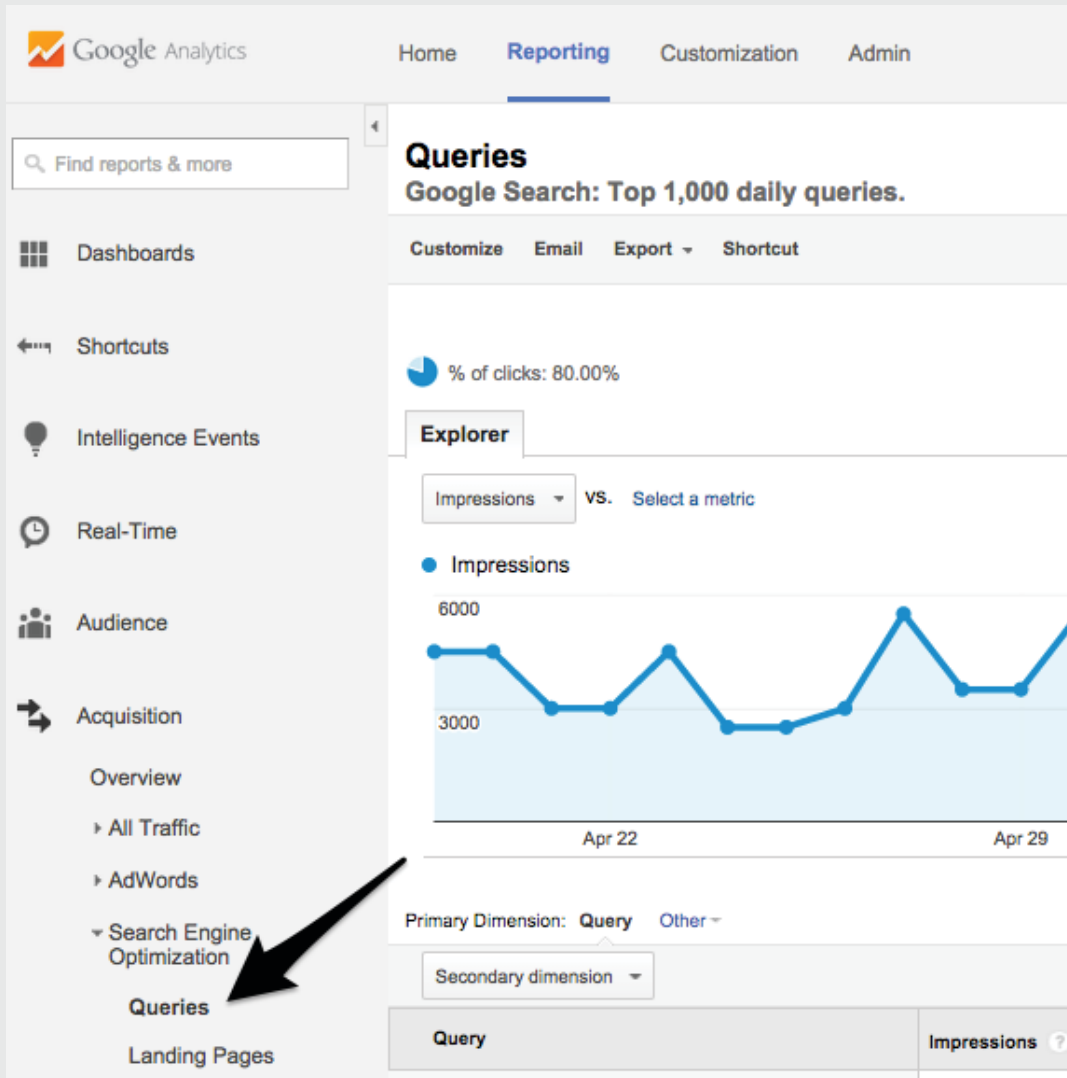
sponsorship or guest content opportunity, you probably wouldn't have known about it had you not checked out your site's referral traffic!

Search Engine Optimization

The next thing we want to focus on is SEO, or search engine optimization. If you, or your IT or marketing department, hasn't connected your Google Analytics with your Google Search Console account (formerly Google Webmaster Tools), you're probably not going to see anything here. If you have the two free services bound together, you're going to want to look in the SEO section first, for queries [Figure 5].

There are two types of search: branded and unbranded. Branded search is when someone searches for your company name. Unbranded search is when someone searches for keywords associated with your industry or business to find your website.

Find the name of your company or brand in the list. You want to focus on the number of clicks and the position on the page. If PR is successful at using media to build up your audience, people should be hearing about you, learning what your company is about and wanting to learn more. What's the next logical thing to do if you are interested in a company or a brand and you read about it in the newspaper or see it on TV or see its Facebook page? You search for it.

As PR professionals, you want to see the number of clicks and position constantly going up. This data is data that you can export and look at every couple of months. We recommend checking in with your site's SEO rankings once a month to see how your branded search is increasing or decreasing. Are you showing up more in search results? Are you getting more clicks? Is your page position improving?

Another thing to pay attention to as a PR pro is unbranded search keywords. Remember, these are words not necessarily associated directly with the name of your brand, but still drive traffic to your website. Unbranded keywords show you what you're getting clicks for, what topics the internet thinks you are relevant to, and what topics the Internet thinks you're not necessarily relevant to.

Need some fresh pitching ideas? Sort the keyword table by click-through rate. Scroll down until you are not seeing 100% in the CTR column. If you're already getting 100% of the clicks for that keyword, people are finding what they're looking for when they search that keyword. It's the keywords without 100% you want to pay attention to – the keywords that are driving traffic somewhere else when you want them to go to your website. By looking at keywords you're getting some clicks from but not all, you can get more content out there pointing keywords around that topic to your website.
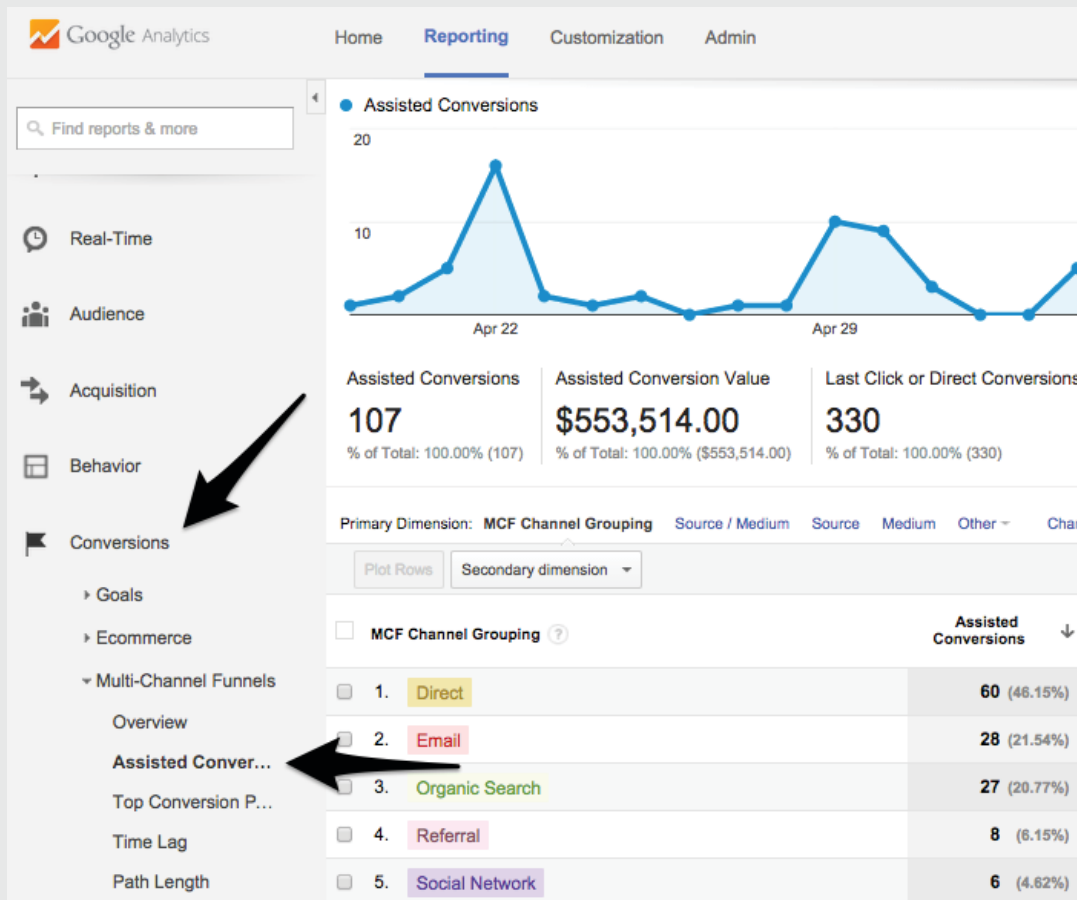
Conversions

The final metric to watch out for in Google Analytics when you work in PR is conversions. Specifically, let's look at multi-channel funnels. Prior to August 24, 2011, whenever someone did something on your website, Google characterized that as a "last click" or "last touch" attribution. This means that no matter how many steps someone took in their path to conversion, the last thing they did was what got credit.

Imagine you're working in your corporate communications role and you've done a great job with webinars. You've got some great placements for your pitches, from newspapers to blogs to broadcast. The marketing department, on the other hand, sent out one email saying, "Hey, you saw us on the news. Click here to buy our product." Prior to August 24, 2011, that email newsletter would have gotten all the credit, even though you did most of the work. You got the broadcast placement, you got the great story...and then, the email went out. Because the software wasn't sophisticated enough to figure that out, the email got all the credit and you got none of it. Multichannel funnels changed that.
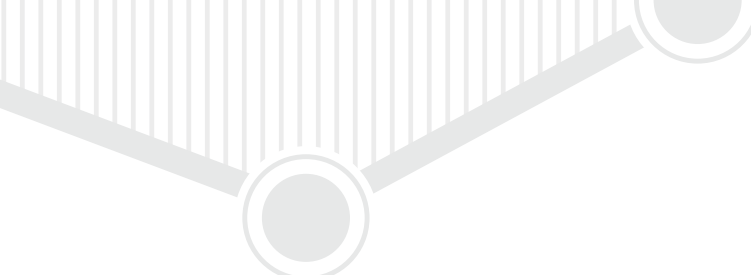
Figure 6

Figure 6

Within the Conversions tab, click on "Multi-Channel Funnels," and then click on "Assisted Conversions" [Figure 6].

If you think back to our example, assisted conversions are now where you would see your media placement. This is again where having goals and goal values are important — without them, you'd have zero conversions and no dollar values. Working on social media for a client? You can also look here to find out if social media is driving any bottom-line business results.

Think of assisted conversions like Jenga, the popular game where you pull blocks out of a tower one at a time until the tower falls (and you lose). Assisted conversions are like digital Jenga. If you think one channel or network isn't working for you and you stop using it, will your tower fall? It might. It might not. But, if you're trying to make the case for the value of what you're doing, this is a
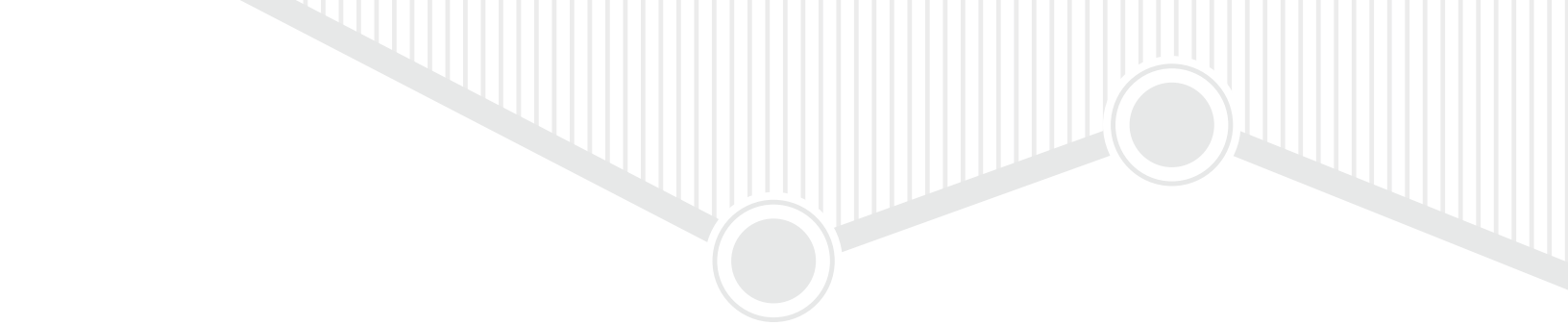
great place to illustrate not only your direct impact on conversions (sales), but also assisted conversions. This page is a way to see a more complete picture of the value you're generating across channels and sources.

In the first section, we learned about your audience. In the second section, we learned about how your audience finds your company. Finally, conversions showed us how you can take all the information about your audience and their acquisition to help showcase the value you're providing to a brand. This is the first part of establishing the ROI of public relations.

What Google Analytics Can't Measure

Google Analytics is not the answer to every single problem when it comes to proving the value of public relations...but it comes pretty close. One thing it cannot measure is when someone leaves the click stream. For example, I see a webinar from your company. I later forget your company exists. Some time later, I see a bus sign and, for a reason unknown to me, it reminds me that your company exists. I go and search for it. If enough time passes, Google Analytics is going to say that the webinar and the bus sign are not related, even though they are. Why? Google Analytics has about a 90-day window that it can look at before it loses track of a user.

Another thing Google Analytics cannot measure is when click streams are non-direct. Let's say you're standing around the water cooler with a coworker and they recommend a new coffee shop to you. You then search for the shop or actually visit it and purchase a coffee. Google can't see that.

The third thing Google can't measure is something that originates outside of the click stream. For example, if you read a physical copy of the New York Times and then search for a company you just read about. Organic search will be considered the originating touch point, even though the New York Times, the physical paper edition, is what got you interested in the first place.

To overcome these shortfalls of Google Analytics, you have to do some variation of surveying your audience to ask them how they heard about your company or why did they choose your company over a competitor. Asking people will give you a lot more depth and understanding of how your PR activities are informing digital activities.

Conclusion

As the communications industry continues to evolve and the lines between paid, earned and owned media blur, data-driven insights will become standard. Google Analytics is just one tool of many that PR professionals should have in their toolbox to support strategy, help glean insights and demonstrate the true, bottom-line value of PR.

If you've enjoyed this eBook, we encourage you to check out SHIFT's many other resources to stay up to date on the latest taking place around the industry.

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Blatant Sales Pitch

We would be remiss if we didn't say that if all of this feels overwhelming, we're happy to help. Engage our services for your marketing and earned media needs and we'll show you how your company and brand can shine, get attention from the audiences that will benefit you most, and drive bottom-line results in a measurable way.

Click here to contact us and engage our services:
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Blatant Social Panhandling

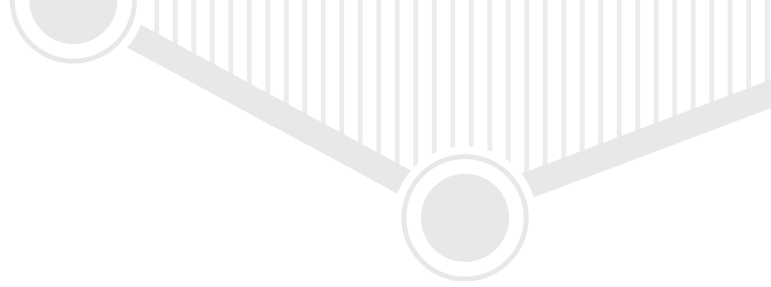If you liked this guide, please share it on the social network of your choice!
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