

Recommendation for Action

How to deal with the end of Google Universal Analytics

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1 Summary

This year Google announced the official end of Universal Analytics. In this document, we summarize the most important information expected from Google and provide you with sensible next steps and considerations for the Google Analytics 4 rollout and setup.

When is the official end of Universal Analytics?

- Universal Analytics will stop collecting new data on **1st July, 2023** (in about 12 months).
- Universal Analytics 360 (the paid version) customers have time until **1st October, 2023** (approximately 15 months) to make the transition.
- About 6 months later, companies will still be able to access Universal Analytics data, but no new data will be added. Subsequently, Google will shut down access to Universal Analytics and Google Analytics 4 will take the place of Universal Analytics.

What does that mean for me?

- We recommend you **export your historical reports** within this time period.
- The transition to GA4 requires a complete rethink of your data strategy. **Instead of a session-based data model, GA4 is based on events.** Everything in GA4 is an event, even a page view.
- A thorough and effective analytics implementation can take **months of planning, preparation, and implementation.** In addition, several QA rounds are necessary to ensure the data is tracked and reported correctly in GA4.
- If Universal Analytics is used as an analytics tool and a full year of historical data is required (which is important to most companies), it is necessary to implement GA4 **now**.

GA4: A Short Status Quo

After an initial slow start, GA4 recently added **a few new features** including amongst others: new UTM dimensions, landing page dimensions, DV360 and SA360 integration, sub-properties, roll-ups, data-driven attribution, etc.

All in all, GA4 is **more future-proof**, based on modern technology and on a logical data scheme.

Examples, of what GA4 can not yet do:

- Adaptation of the default channel grouping (i.e. create your own marketing channels, which are then considered as standard)
- Session scoped dimensions (which are scoped to the user session in Google's backend, i.e. there are only visitor variables and hit variables).
- Product Scoped Dimensions (i.e. product tracking variables with product syntax)
- Detailed User Management

Disclaimer:

This document aims to provide additional assistance and guidance in preparing for a Google Analytics 4 roll out. Google will continue to roll out changes and updates to GA4 over the next few months, so additional actions may be required over time.

2 Strategic Questions

Before implementing GA4 you should consider the following strategic questions:

- Do you intend to use your already existing **Data Layer** (with possible adaptations) or would you like to create a new Data Layer? For further details regarding different Data Layer schemes for GA4 please refer to 3.3, 3rd paragraph.
- Do you intend to re-vamp your **Event Tracking**? Introducing this flexibility results in the necessity of considering how to set up and use the event logic in GA4.
- Will *purchase* be the only **conversion** in GA4 or are there other conversions based on events needed? This is especially relevant for non-e-commerce cases.
- **Account structure aspects:** To date, no views are only available for GA 360 users. Users of the free GA3 version have to work without views at the moment. If multiple country markets exist in this case, a separate property is needed for each country. You have the possibility to create an additional global property. In this case, data should be sent with two separate property IDs.
- Which attribution model and lookback window should be used for marketing?

3 Operational Questions

3/1 Preparation & Implementation Phase

For a smooth transition to GA4, a number of preparatory steps in different tools are necessary:

Google Tag Manager

- Prepare your GA4 Configuration Tag
- Prepare your specific Event Tags
(At the moment only one generic event template is available. To migrate existing e-commerce tags from UA3, you have to use the offered generic event template in GA4 and adapt it accordingly.)
- Integrate GA4 in your Consent Management Tool and perform a full-scale test on whether your GA4 tracking is in accordance with user consent.

Google Analytics 4 Interface

- Create GA4 account (if not done yet)
- Create Data Stream: decide which platform should be covered in GA4 account (web or app)?
- Set-up data collection: pay attention to different IDs, for GTM **measurement ID** is required
- Which events should be collected automatically (out-of-the box solution from Google, events must be activated/deactivated explicitly)?
- Set the basic configuration
- Enable Google Signals data collection
- Select Data Retention
- Set the connection to BigQuery if you plan to use raw data
- Decide if you need to filter out internal traffic. The filter functionality in GA4 is not compatible with filter options offered in Universal Analytics.
- Default Reporting Identity (Cookies only or Cookies with User ID)
- Define attribution model and lookback window in the interface
- Ensure the link between GA4 and Google Ads is properly established.
- Evaluate if you require further product links besides Google Ads (e.g. Ad Manager, Display & Video 360, Search Ads 360, Search Console).
- Set custom dimensions and metrics
- Mark additional conversions in the interface if necessary

BigQuery

- Set up a billing account (if not done yet)
- Create a BigQuery project (if not done yet)
- Activate BigQuery API
- **FELDM Recommendation:** Monitor your billing account to familiarize yourself with possible expected costs in Big Query.

3/2 Data Validation Phase

Once you have published your implementation, it is recommended to evaluate your data in GA4 and compare it with data from previous GA3 version and/or DWH.

- Check your general traffic & e-commerce KPIs
- Check your event data
- Check your e-Commerce data

3/3 Special Use Case: e-Commerce Shop

For e-Commerce shops there are (especially within the e-Commerce section of GA4) some additional things you should keep in mind.

Although there are a few new **events** added to the e-Commerce section in GA4 as standard events, the general logic remains the same. A substantial number of events stay the same but were given a slightly different name.

There are some changes introduced with **product syntax in the data layer**. Companies can decide between integrating a new data layer (which will presumably consume more time and resources) or using the existing data layer with necessary syntax adjustments (e.g. for the product tracking part).

Note:

There are special custom JavaScript mappers available to accomplish the syntax modification. If you introduce a data layer from scratch, it is recommendable to design it with the integration of the new GA4 syntax. The full description how to measure e-Commerce with code examples might be found here: [Measure e-Commerce](#)

Important: As mentioned in the beginning, the possibility to use session-scoped and product-scoped custom dimensions and metrics is still missing in GA4. Upon availability, this missing functionality should be added at a later point of time.

3/4 Privacy

Google is also preparing GA4 as a compliant solution that should only work with data which is anonymous and not customer specific. How this is going to work exactly has not yet been communicated.

In the case that Universal Analytics is the main (or equal) platform for data collection, at the moment there is no need to introduce specific adjustments in your privacy policy, except of informing the users that you are using GA4.

If you follow our suggestion to activate **Google Signals**, you should check with your Data Privacy Officer (or your legal department) whether you should inform your users about this and adjust your consent banner. The adjustment may need to include the hint to consider logging out of any Google Account to generate and send less data to Google and potentially to the USA, having a lower level of Data Security.

Of course it is obligatory to collect consent from your users for GA4.

If you have any further or more concrete questions, are curious for our advice or need help with your strategic approach or implementation tasks, feel free to reach out to your Account Manager at FELDM or contact our Google Team via google.analytics@feld-m.de.