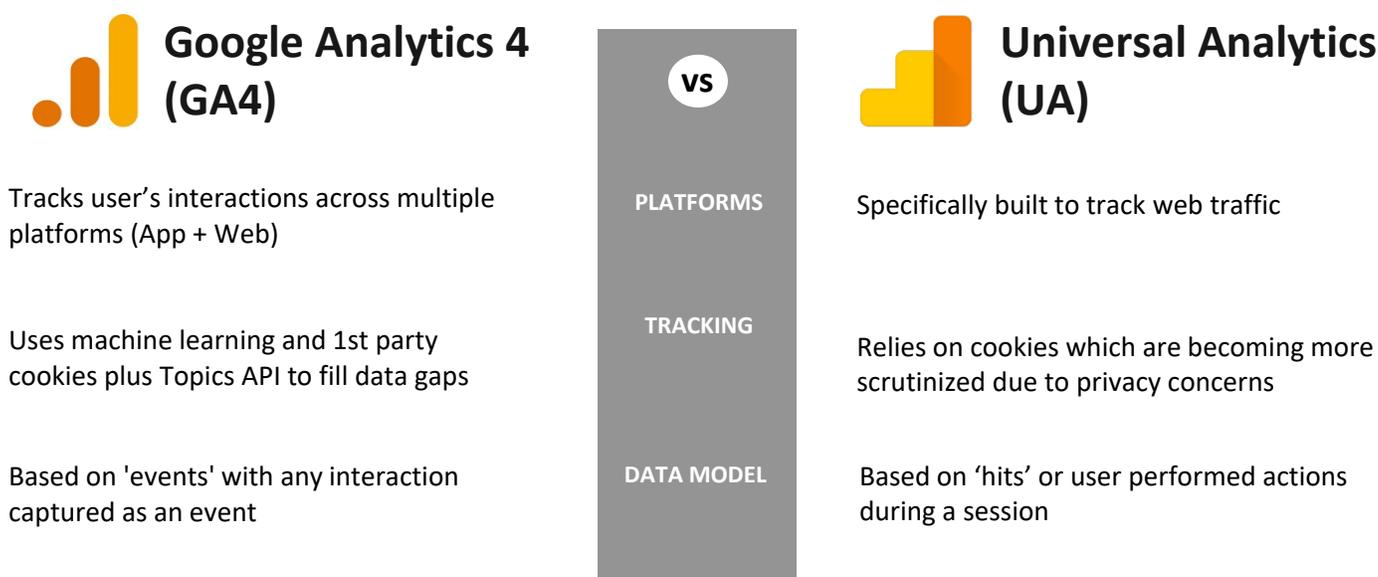


Google Analytics 4 (GA4) vs. Universal Analytics (UA)

Since the launch of Google Analytics in 2005, Google has continued to evolve their enterprise analytics product with the launch of Universal Analytics (UA) in 2013, and more recently in October 2020 launched Google Analytics 4 (GA4) – their solution to get ahead of the growing user privacy push and offer the ability to track via 1st party cookies.

Seeing that GA4 will eventually replace UA, it's essential to understand the differences between the two versions and the impact on your business. Here's a quick comparison of the three largest differences that you should be aware of. Read on to learn more about these differences in greater detail.



Google recently announced that Universal Analytics will stop processing website activity on **July 1, 2023** and the processing of any new events will only be available in GA4. Furthermore, existing UA properties will only be accessible for approximately six months thereafter. In order to have at least one year's worth of comparative data, **BFO recommends setting up GA4 no later than July 1, 2022**, regardless of whether you are ready to fully migrate off of UA.

Benefits of GA4:

- Seamless measurement of users cross-platform from app to website
 - Single set of metrics and dimensions making it possible to compare app and web data
 - Ability to better track how many users started on an app and then moved to website or vice versa
- GDPR and CCPA compliant using first-party cookies or cookieless tracking
 - Improved machine learning to fill in data gaps, "modeling"
- Flexible event-based model that allows for easier tracking of actions
 - Some automation of manual tagging for events like scrolls, downloads, video views
- New custom data visualization possibilities in platform
- Better funnel options to understand how users engage with a sequence of key events on app and website
- Improved path analysis to understand in between steps of a funnel
- Free connection to Big Query (UA does not come w/ free connection unless you are using GA 360)

PLATFORMS:

UA is mostly used for tracking **website** data. Although you can track mobile apps through UA the set-up is complicated as many of the automated standard attributes don't exist when applying the same tracking to mobile apps. For example, a widely used website metric is pageviews. Apps use screens instead of pages rendering the pageview metric useless. Instead, it is necessary to specify a hit type of screenview. This means that while you can track mobile apps with UA, you'd need to set up a separate property and then compare your web and app data separately or perform complex matching of each property for a holistic view.

GA4 stems from a beta project called App + Web which boasted the ability to measure both **app and website** traffic together for the first time. The idea was to make measuring users that use multiple devices and mediums to interact with a company that much easier. As we know, users don't just interact with companies in one way - there are tens, if not hundreds of little interactions that play across a user's journey before they convert. This beta then became a fully launched and rolled out GA4 which still focuses on this primary principle of tracking a user from app to web and back again. Effectively, GA4 allows a company to get a unified picture of engagement across devices without the manual matching previously needed with UA.

TRACKING:

UA relies on cookies to track which users performed what actions on a site. Cookies are files that store information about a user. They are designed to follow a user around as they browse the internet to create a more detailed profile of who you are and create a personalized experience. As the world moves more toward user-privacy, cookies are becoming more scrutinized as there is an obvious ability to misuse this information. This is particularly prevalent for 3rd party cookies which allow websites to track users across multiple websites, not just their own site to help you keep track of your password or what you have in your cart.

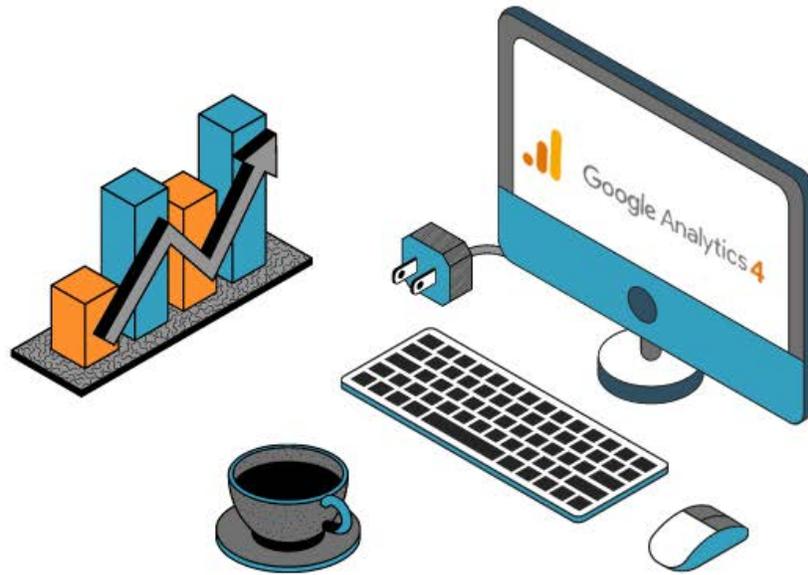
GA4 is Google's answer to get ahead of this user privacy push and offer the ability to track via 1st party cookies (only tracking on website at hand) and going even further to cookieless tracking. GA4 also has higher machine learning capabilities, called modeling, which help fill in data gaps when data is incomplete. This is where Topics API (which replaced FLoC) becomes vital in cookieless tracking even though it is a work in progress. GA4 also uses multiple forms of identification, including marketer-provided User IDs and unique Google signals from users opted into ads personalization.

DATA MODEL:

A big difference between UA and GA4 for marketers is within the platform itself - the way the data is recorded otherwise known as the data model. Within UA data is collected through what is called 'hits,' based on a session. A session is a set period of time that a user is interacting with your website. Within the sessions, users perform actions on the website, called hits, which are then recorded back in UA. Examples of these hits are pageviews, ecommerce transactions, button clicks, etc.

GA4 records data differently as everything is based on events with the principle being that any interaction can be captured as an event. For example, when someone visits one of your pages this triggers a pageview event. Because everything is tracked in GA4 as an event, there is no Event Category, Event Action, or Event Label structure as in UA. Google suggests it's better to "rethink your data collection in terms of Google Analytics 4 model rather than port your existing event structure to Google Analytics 4," which is Google's nice way of saying, your old structure isn't going to make much sense in GA4.

**Need help with your transition to GA4? Be Found Online is here to help!
Contact your BFO Account Director or sales@befoundonline.com to learn more.**



Preparing for GA4: Google's Analytics March 2022 Announcement

On March 16, 2022, Google released an announcement notifying users that Universal Analytics is being retired in 2023. For standard users (the free version of Google Analytics) UA will retire July 1st, 2023. For GA360 premium users, UA will retire October 1st, 2023.

What Does Retiring Universal Analytics Mean for You?

No matter which version of Google Analytics (GA) you have, it's more important than ever to make sure you have a GA4 property to continue to collect website data, and to make sure it's configured correctly to collect data you rely on. Users will still have access to their Universal Analytics (UA) accounts to pull historical data, but data will stop collecting on July 1, 2023 for standard UA users and on October 1, 2023 for GA360 premium users. Google has mentioned it will cut access to UA accounts as early as 6 months from the retirement date, meaning January 2024 for standard users, although a hard set date has not been given yet. This means you'll need to not only start collecting GA4 data now to get that Year-over-Year data before the sunset date next year, but also have a plan on where you'll store your historical UA data so you can continue to access it if needed.

What Should You Be Doing About UA Retiring?

First, log into your GA account and look for a GA4 property to make sure you've upgraded your account. GA4 is free to upgrade to, no matter which version of GA you use. Next click into that account to make sure you're tracking automatically collected event data.

If you track additional GA events, know that you cannot simply have GA4 collect the same events as UA due to GA4 events being displayed differently. It is recommended you reconsider what needs to be tagged and then retag everything for GA4.

While you technically don't need to have anything done until next year, it's important to get this process done fairly quickly (by either July 1st, or October 1st, 2022) if you are looking for YoY data within your GA4 account.

Long Term GA Planning – Server Side Tagging

At BFO we found that it's best to do both your GA4 tagging upgrade and server side tagging together so you're set up for long term use as data privacy laws quickly change. Doing this in tandem with your GA4 migration means efforts aren't duplicated down the road.

Server side tagging adjusts how data is collected from your website. Currently, user tracking happens through the browser sending user data directly to a third-party system like Facebook or Google Analytics. With server side tagging the tracked data goes first to your server before being sent to the third-party system. This leads to improved performance and better security for your visitor data, which is becoming increasingly important as data management policies change. Doing one without the other will mean your team is duplicating efforts by splitting up this work.

Have More Questions Than Answers?

Don't worry, many people are in the same boat. Not sure what's happening, what's changing, and what steps need to be taken to continue to use Google Analytics? Make sure to speak with your account manager or reach out to Be Found Online if you need help with upgrading and configuring your GA4 account to be set up for the long haul.