



Google Analytics 4 is Coming **What Vehicle Dealerships Need to Know**



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A New Approach To Analytics

Universal Analytics (UA) will be discontinued on July 1, 2023, and replaced with Google Analytics 4 (GA4). The name may indicate a simple change, but GA4 is a completely new platform.

“GA4 isn’t so much an update, but an entirely new way of doing analytics – set up to scale for the future, work in a cookieless world, and be a lot more privacy-conscious.”

Krista Seiden, Founder KS Digital, Google Product Manager for Google Analytics

While much of the technology and terminology have changed, the transition is essentially a matter of exploring new methods for digital engagement. And GA4 enables omnichannel integration, which UA was not designed to do.

Q3 of 2023 may seem far away, but the time to begin preparing for GA4 is now. With the right information, dealerships can not only adapt — **they can thrive**. Dealerships can begin by examining their current data strategies and deciding what data privacy and protection policies they will implement moving forward. Then, assess what will need to change in order to remain compliant with the new standards. Once dealerships make those choices, they can create and implement strategic initiatives through GA4 that will empower the dealership.

Universal Analytics: A Quick Refresh

The outgoing Universal Analytics is built on a model that’s over fifteen years old. In software, that’s long past time to leave the nest. It measures independent desktop web interactions and depends on cookies to track activities. The data collected is based on independent sessions (or interactions by one user within a given time). The technology started becoming obsolete long ago with the mass adoption of smartphones and other internet-enabled devices aside from desktop computers. Around that time, consumers also stopped browsing and buying on single channels and instead began bouncing between them. Omnichannel analysis quickly became necessary. As digital engagement changes, so too must measurement.

There were only two properties in the past: UA for measuring websites and Google Analytics for Firebase for measuring mobile app activity. With GA4, UA won’t process data. All new data will flow through GA4. GA4 seamlessly and intelligently combines all data streams to report a dealership’s selected key insights. Previous data from Google Analytics will be accessible for an unknown period following the transition.



What's New in GA4

More and more, people expect to interact with businesses whenever and however it is most convenient for them — for example, researching a product on their phone and then purchasing it later on their computer. Obtaining insight into these omnichannel user journeys is critical for dealerships to better digitally engage, understand consumer behavior, predict customers' needs, and provide great experiences.

Since most businesses have adopted omnichannel technology, GA4 is built to handle various data streams. It uses events instead of sessions to measure performance and doesn't rely exclusively on cookies. It combines UA and Google Analytics for Firebase, providing more flexibility and new features. Additionally, GA4 will operate across platforms, not just mobile and desktop.

Fewer Cookies, More Privacy

While Universal Analytics (UA) offered some privacy controls, GA4 is designed with privacy at its core. As more consumers opt out of sharing their data (cookies) and become fiercer guardians of their online privacy, it is clear that the outgoing Google Analytics platform can't fully report on all the people who visit websites.

GA4 doesn't store IP addresses and relies on first-party cookies, which operate only on a single domain. Third-party cookies, on the other hand, can track activities across the internet. That is why GA4 uses Machine Learning (ML) and other technologies to fill in necessary gaps. It collects data from websites and apps so that the dealership can better understand the customer journey.

GA4 cannot retain data indefinitely as UA did, which furnishes consumers with more privacy. In GA4, data can be kept for either two months or fourteen months. After the selected time has expired, the data is treated depending on the type:

Aggregated data is retained and still available in standard reports. An example of aggregated data is the total number of users who visited a VDP page, or the most visited VDPs in the last 30 days.

Disaggregated data will no longer be available. An example of disaggregated data is the number of users who visited a VDP page organized by traffic source, like Google Organic, Direct Traffic, or Display.

Since aggregate data will remain available for 14 months, dealerships should start running GA4 simultaneously with UA to run a year-over-year report in 2023.



What's New in GA4 Continued

Events versus Sessions

While UA was session-based, GA4 is event-based. Interactions, like page views, will be considered events. In UA, the number of page views within a time frame is considered part of one session. The events-based model is an improvement because it is a more accurate measure of consumer behavior. Almost every interaction recorded by GA4 will now be considered an event, providing more detailed information than UA.

Spam Detection

Only hits with a private key can send data to GA4. In the past, spammers and bots could send fake information to a website, leading to false reports.

User Interface

UA codes or tracking IDs will now be known as Measurement IDs. Google Analytics was designed to pull quick and simple reports built on templates. With GA4, dealerships have the flexibility to create custom reports — but they also need to learn how.

	Universal Analytics properties	Google Analytics 4 properties
Measurement	Session-based data model	Flexible event-based data model
Reporting	Limited cross-device and cross-platform reporting	Full cross-device and cross-platform reporting
Automation	Limited automation	Machine learning to improve and simplify insight discovery





Designed to Scale With Your Business: GA4 Key Benefits

By measuring more accurately across devices and platforms, GA4 is designed to scale with dealership growth and channel complexity. Dealerships can customize the structure of GA4 properties to meet local or updated requirements and can adapt to constantly changing digital environments and evolving omnichannel strategies. The Machine Learning capability will also aid in predictions for marketing improvements and increased digital engagement. The omnichannel platform drives many additional enhancements and benefits which are discussed below.

Superior Customer Understanding

Since GA4 measures events across touchpoints, dealerships will have more significant insights into customers' shopping journeys. GA4 can measure, unify, and de-duplicate all consumer interactions with vehicle retailers across devices and platforms, giving dealers a complete and timely understanding of the customer experience.

Consumers often switch devices or profiles as they interact. Flexible tools are necessary to make sense of these different data streams. GA4 can de-duplicate users across data from different devices. This means a single user journey can be measured across devices based on the best available user identifiers. Dealers can use Google's signed-in data, bring in their own identifier for signed-in users, or seamlessly use both, and GA4 will always choose the best available option for each situation.

More Valuable Data Improves ROI

The machine learning component of GA4 provides predictive insights about consumer behavior and conversions. Dealerships can utilize this information to create segments such as "Likely to Purchase" and automatically have insights into how to improve marketing efforts. Machine learning automates and facilitates insight discovery, enabling dealers to easily extract the most value from the data. This allows dealerships to more effectively leverage data and insights to achieve measurable marketing outcomes.

Easier Integrations and Scalability

Digital engagement is easier than ever with GA4. Any GA4 property can be integrated with Analytics data. Dealerships can also have higher limits for dimensions, audiences, and conversion types.



Customize, Measure, and More: GA4 for Dealerships

The first step is to decide the property type best suited for the dealership. The sooner these properties are created, the sooner historical data will be built to make future analysis and reporting more meaningful. Building historical data quickly also means dealerships can begin digital engagement faster and capture and track more trends and insights over a longer time. Getting started now means that next year dealers can create a year-over-year report.

Getting Started with Implementation

It's best to run both UA and GA4 at the same time for as long as possible to prevent disruptions in business. This allows GA4 to begin gathering data while UA is still operational. Dealers can take this time to determine the best methods to integrate and migrate analytics processes to GA4.

When they're ready, dealerships can implement GA4 in two ways:

- Via direct implementation of a JavaScript tag placed on all pages of the website's backend
- Through a container such as GTM

Both methods depend on the person who controls the backend of a dealer's website — usually a website provider.

Evaluation

Once GA4 is implemented, dealers can create customized goals and events based on their KPIs, just like before. The main differences are that now these goals will be event-based, not session-based, and some previously available information may no longer be accessible due to the privacy changes.

Ongoing Performance Measurement

As with any Google Analytics best practice, the best thing dealers can do is ensure that key analytics tools are running at all times. Lapses in tracking can — and will — adversely affect future analysis and decision-making.





GA4: Empowering Dealerships

Stay Up-to-Date

It's important for dealers to revisit their analytics strategy every so often to ensure that the practices set in place are still relevant and providing value. To remain current with new changes to Google Analytics, check in from time to time with the Google Support website. There are regularly posted announcements that highlight new features and important updates to the platform, as well as a community page where dealers can explore questions and strategies from other Google Analytics users.

Your Dealership: Future-Forward and Omnichannel-Ready

GA4 empowers dealerships to take control of their analytics and gain visibility into behaviors like website traffic origin and engagement behavior. Dealerships can use GA4 to identify trends and patterns in their data to help them better digitally engage with consumers, create customized shopping experiences, and make more informed business decisions. As with most new practices, the best way to get comfortable with GA4 is to start using it as early as possible. GA4's innovative methods for measuring and capturing data across platforms means dealerships can measure digital engagement across a true omnichannel experience like never before.

Google Analytics 4 is coming — and it will pack a major positive punch for dealerships ready to move their customer experience into the future.

