# Table of Contents

**Introduction** xiv

**Lesson 1: A 10-Minute Guide to Web Analytics** 1
- Understanding Web Analytics .................................................... 1
- Why Analyze Website Traffic? ................................................ 1
- Who Uses Web Analytics? ..................................................... 2
- How Web Analytics Works ..................................................... 3
- Beyond Data Collection: Using Web Analytics Data ............... 3
- Web Analytics and Internet Advertising ................................... 4
- Understanding Key Metrics ................................................... 5
- Getting to Know Google Analytics ........................................... 7
- Summary ................................................................................ 8

**Lesson 2: Creating a Google Analytics Account** 9
- Creating a Google Account ..................................................... 9
- Signing Up for Google Analytics ............................................... 11
- Summary .............................................................................. 13

**Lesson 3: Adding Google Analytics to Your Website** 15
- Adding Your Website to Google Analytics ............................... 15
- Adding Google Analytics Code to Your Website ....................... 17
- Tracking Blog Performance ..................................................... 18
- Regenerating the Tracking Code ............................................. 21
- Adding Another Website to Google Analytics ............................ 22
- Summary .............................................................................. 24

**Lesson 4: Using the Google Analytics Dashboard** 25
- Navigating from the Overview Page ....................................... 25
- Discovering the Dashboard ..................................................... 27
  - Overview Graph ................................................................. 27
  - Site Usage Table ............................................................... 29
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitors Overview</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map Overlay</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Sources Overview</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Overview</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidebar</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting and Emailing Dashboard Data</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting PDF Data</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting XML Data</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailing PDF Data</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson 5: Customizing Data in the Dashboard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaying Different Metrics</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing Two Metrics</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphing by Day, Week, or Month</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing the Date Range</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing Two Different Date Ranges</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filtering Results by Segment</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Custom Visitor Segments</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotating Data Points</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson 6: Tracking Visitors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Visitor Tracking</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Visitors Overview</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmarking Visitor Statistics</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping Visitors by Region</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing New Versus Returning Visitors</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Visitors by Language</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Visitor Trends</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Visitor Loyalty</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Visitors’ Browser Capabilities</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Visitors’ Network Properties</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Mobile Visitors</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 7: Analyzing Traffic Sources</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where Does Your Traffic Come From?</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Traffic Sources Overview</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Direct Traffic</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Traffic from Referring Sites</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing Traffic from Search Engines</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 8: Analyzing Top Content</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Content Analysis Matters</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Content Overview Report</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Overview Graph</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the Key Statistics</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top Content</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing a Navigation Analysis</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Landing Page Optimization</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Your Top Pages</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top Landing Pages</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top Exit Pages</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 9: Tracking AdSense Performance</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Google AdSense</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating AdSense with Google Analytics</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing the AdSense Overview Report</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top AdSense Content</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top AdSense Referrers</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 10: Viewing the Site Overlay Report

Lesson 11: Tracking AdWords Traffic

Lesson 12: Tracking Ecommerce
Lesson 13: Measuring Site Search Usage 123

Understanding Site Search .................................................. 123
Configuring Google Analytics to Track Site Search .............. 124
Viewing Site Search Reports ............................................. 125
   Site Search Overview .................................................... 125
   Usage ................................................................. 127
   Search Terms .......................................................... 127
   Start Pages ............................................................ 129
   Destination Pages ...................................................... 129
   Categories .............................................................. 129
   Trending .................................................................. 129
Summary ........................................................................ 130

Lesson 14: Setting Up Goals and Funnels 131

Understanding Goals and Funnels ........................................ 131
Defining Your Goals .......................................................... 132
Defining Funnels .................................................................. 133
Measuring Your Goals ....................................................... 134
   Overview ................................................................. 135
   Total Conversions ....................................................... 135
   Conversion Rate ......................................................... 135
   Goal Verification ........................................................ 136
   Reverse Goal Path ...................................................... 136
   Goal Value ................................................................ 136
   Goal Abandoned Funnels .......................................... 136
   Funnel Visualization .................................................. 137
Summary ........................................................................ 137

Lesson 15: Using Event Tracking 139

Understanding Event Tracking ............................................. 139
Defining Events ............................................................... 139
Defining Parameters ....................................................... 139
Setting Up Event Tracking ............................................... 140
## Monitoring Event Tracking

- Overview .................................................... 141
- Categories ................................................ 142
- Actions ..................................................... 143
- Labels ......................................................... 143
- Trending ...................................................... 143
- Hostnames ............................................... 143

**Summary** ................................................. 143

### Lesson 16: Creating Custom Reports 145

- Understanding Metrics and Dimensions .................. 145
  - Metrics ................................................. 145
  - Dimensions ........................................... 146
- Creating a Custom Report ................................ 148
- Viewing Your Report ..................................... 150
  - Changing the Overview Graph ......................... 151
  - Sorting by Metric .................................... 151
  - Selecting Different Views ............................. 151
  - Visualizing Your Data—in Motion .................... 152
- Revisiting Custom Reports ................................ 153

**Summary** ................................................. 153

### Lesson 17: Filtering Data 155

- Understanding Filters ................................... 155
- Creating a Predefined Filter ............................ 155
- Creating a Custom Filter ................................ 157
- Managing Your Filters ................................... 160

**Summary** ................................................. 161

### Lesson 18: Customizing the Google Analytics Tracking Code 163

- Why You Might Want to Customize Google’s Tracking Code 163
- Editing the Tracking Code ................................ 164
Lesson 19: Creating User-Defined Visitor Types

Understanding User-Defined Visitors
Creating a Customer Type for Visitors to a Specific Page
Creating a Customer Type for Visitors Who Click a Specific Link
Tracking User-Defined Visitor Types
Summary

Lesson 20: Filtering Out Internal Traffic

Why You Want to Exclude Yourself from Your Site Reports
Filtering Traffic from Static IP Addresses
  Filtering a Single IP Address
  Filtering a Range of IP Addresses
Customizing the Tracking Code to Exclude Internal Traffic
Summary

Lesson 21: Tracking Error Pages and Broken Links

Why You Want to Track Error Pages on Your Site
Modifying the Tracking Code
Creating an Error Pages Report—and Fixing Broken Links
Summary

Lesson 22: Tracking File Downloads

Why You Might Want to Track Files Downloaded from Your Site
Creating the Tracking Code
Viewing the Tracking Data
Summary
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 23: Tracking Full Referring URLs</th>
<th>187</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why You Want to See Full Referring URLs</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Filter to Display Full Referring URLs</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Full Referring URLs</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 24: Identifying Poorly Performing Pages</th>
<th>191</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to Identify Poor Performers</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Top Exit Pages</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Poor-Performing Landing Pages</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Poor-Performing Checkout Pages</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 25: Fixing Problem Pages with Website Optimizer</th>
<th>197</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Website Optimizer</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Website Optimizer Works</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Types of Testing</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting an A/B Test</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing Test Data</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Index | 205 |
Introduction

Is your website performing as well as it should? Are you retaining visitors—or losing them too fast? Are you converting lookers to buyers—or are they bouncing from your site before they finish the checkout process?

When you want to find out more about the people visiting your website, turn to Google Analytics. Google Analytics is a free tool offered by Google that generates detailed statistics about website visitors. This tool—actually, a series of detailed reports—tracks visitors from all referring sources, including search engines, pay-per-click (PPC) advertising networks (such as Google AdWords), display advertisements, email marketing, and other channels. It tells you how visitors found your site—and if they came from a search engine, just what they were searching for.

But that’s not all. Google Analytics tells you what pages these people visit on your site, how long they view each page, and where they exit your site. It’s information that is both interesting and useful; Google Analytics is a great tool for improving the effectiveness of any website.

The problem is that Google Analytics offers so much detailed data, it’s hard to keep it all straight. There’s so much there, it’s overwhelming. How do you know what report holds the information you need? And how do you customize Google Analytics to work best with your specific pages?

That’s where this book comes in. Sams Teach Yourself Google Analytics in 10 Minutes is a quick-and-easy way to learn how to use Google Analytics to analyze and improve your website. Every lesson in this book is short and to the point, so you can learn everything you need to learn at your own pace, in your own time. Just follow the straightforward Sams Teach Yourself in 10 Minutes game plan: short, goal-oriented lessons that can make you productive with each topic in 10 minutes or less.
What You Need to Know Before You Use This Book

How much prior experience do you need before starting this book? Well, it helps if you have some sort of experience in web marketing, so terms like click-through rate and pageviews aren’t totally foreign. And a little familiarity with HTML might be useful, as Google Analytics requires you to insert (and, in some instances, modify) brief snippets of code into your web pages to activate its tracking functionality. Of course, you can always have someone else on your team do the HTML work; you don’t have to be a coding wizard to do what you need to do. Beyond these basic skills, no prior experience with Google Analytics (or with any web analytics service) is presumed.

About the Sams Teach Yourself in 10 Minutes Series

*Sams Teach Yourself Google Analytics in 10 Minutes* uses a series of short lessons that walk you through the various features of Google Analytics. Each lesson is designed to take about 10 minutes, and each is limited to a particular operation or group of features. Most of the instruction is presented in easy-to-follow numbered steps, and there are plenty of examples and screen shots to show you what things look like along the way. By the time you finish this book, you should feel confident in using Google Analytics to analyze—and improve—your website.

Special Sidebars

In addition to the normal text and figures, you find what we call *sidebars* scattered throughout that highlight special kinds of information. These are intended to help you save time and to teach you important information fast.
CAUTION: Cautions alert you to common mistakes and tell you how to avoid them.

TIP: Tips explain inside hints for using Google Analytics more efficiently.

NOTE: Notes present pertinent pieces of information related to the surrounding discussion.
LESSON 1

A 10-Minute Guide to Web Analytics

In this lesson, you learn what web analytics is—and what it does.

Understanding Web Analytics

When you want to know more about who is visiting your website and what they’re doing there, you need web analytics. But what is this thing called web analytics?

Put simply, web analytics is the collection and analysis of data relating to website visitors. It’s a way to measure the traffic to your website and then find out what visitors are doing during their visits.

What kind of data are measured? Web analytics tracks such metrics as pageviews, visits, unique visitors, and the like. The resulting analysis examines both the quantity and quality of visitors to a site.

The goal of web analytics is to better understand how a website is being used—and apply that information to optimize the site’s usage. It’s more than just basic data collection; it’s an attempt to learn more about how people use a site, and why.

Why Analyze Website Traffic?

If you run a website, why might you want to employ web analytics?

It’s simple: Web analytics helps you better understand the visitors to your site. Analytics tracks visitor behavior, so that you have a better idea what
your site’s visitors are doing—and why. With the right analytics package, you can discover the following:

- How many visitors your site attracts.
- Where your visitors came from—which sites directed the most traffic to your site, as well as where geographically your visitors are located.
- How long visitors are staying on your site.
- What pages visitors visit first—and which they visit last before they leave.
- If visitors came to your site from a search engine, what keywords they searched that brought up your site in their search results.
- If visitors came to your site from an advertisement, where that ad was placed—and what percentage of visitors who clicked on your ad viewed key pages or completed transactions.
- What types of web browsers your visitors are using—so you can better design your site to look good with those browsers.

**Who Uses Web Analytics?**

You might think that web analytics, like other forms of market research, is used primarily by big companies. That isn’t true, however. Web analytics is for any size company or website; a small personal website has access to the same statistics as does a large corporate one.

In fact, any website can benefit from knowing more about its visitors. Websites both large and small can use web analytics to determine where new visitors are coming from and tailor the site’s content to those sources. It’s valuable data, no matter the size of your site—or the amount of traffic it attracts.

And, while web analytics is a great tool for marketing research, it isn’t limited to use by a company’s marketing department. A company’s IT department, for example, can use analytic data to forecast server load and budget appropriately for new equipment purchases; a sales department can
use analytic data to determine the effectiveness of various promotions and placements.

**NOTE: More Than Just Websites**

You can use web analytics to track not just traditional websites, but also blogs, podcasts, online videos, web-based advertisements, and the like.

---

**How Web Analytics Works**

When it comes to tracking web visitors, there are two fundamental types of analytics:

- **Onsite analytics** uses site-specific data to track visitors to a specific website.
- **Offsite analytics** uses Internet-wide information to determine the most visited sites on the web.

Offsite analytics is used to compile industry-wide analysis, while onsite analytics is used to report on individual website performance. Website owners and webmasters are most interested in onsite analytics; this is the type of analytics we discuss primarily in this book.

Onsite analytics works by utilizing a technique known as *page tagging*. This technique places a “bug,” in the form of a bit of JavaScript code, in the basic HTML code for a web page. This embedded code collects certain information about the page and its visitors. This information is then passed on to a web analytics service, which collates the data and uses it to create various analytic reports.

---

**Beyond Data Collection: Using Web Analytics Data**

It may be interesting to know how many people visit your site each month, as well as what sites drove the most traffic to yours, but how can you put this data to good use?
The key is to analyze the data about what happened in the past to both predict and influence what happens in the future. That is, you can use web analytics data to make informed decisions about your website strategy.

Examine the data to determine what is and isn’t working on your site; then use that information to play up your site’s strengths and improve its weaknesses. If you know, for example, that a particular page is pulling a lot of traffic from Google and other search engines, you expand on that page’s content to attract even more of that traffic. Or if you determine that visitors are leaving too soon after viewing a given page—that is, if there’s nothing there to keep them sticking around—you can work to improve that page’s content to be more valuable to visitors.

**TIP: Trends Matter**

When examining web analytics data, it’s tempting to get engrossed by all the raw data available. Although individual numbers are important, it’s more important to examine longer-term trends. For example, it’s more important to examine how the number of visitors is changing over time than it is to obsess over a single visitor number.

**Web Analytics and Internet Advertising**

Web analytics is also valuable if you’re purchasing advertising on the Internet, especially pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. You can track and analyze which campaigns result in the most conversions from clicks to actual sales. And if you’re advertising on Google’s AdWords, you can track which keywords are triggering the most ad displays and which ads have the highest click-through rate.

In other words, you can use web analytics to track the effectiveness of each ad you place. With proper analysis, you can learn which ads are driving the most potential customers and which ads aren’t pulling their weight. That information will help you better place ads in your next campaign; you fine-tune your advertising strategy over time.
Without web analytics, you have no idea which ads are working and which aren’t. You learn from both your successes and your failures.

**Understanding Key Metrics**

There are many different data points that can be collected via web analytics. Some of these data points, or metrics, might be familiar to you; others may not. To that end, Table 1.1 details some of the most important of these metrics and what they measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% exit</td>
<td>The percentage of users who exit from a given web page as a share of pageviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounce rate</td>
<td>The percentage of visits in which the visitor enters and exits on the same page, without visiting any other pages on the site in between.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click</td>
<td>A single instance of a visitor clicking a link from one page to another on the same site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click path</td>
<td>The sequence of clicks that website visitors follow on a given site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click-through rate (CTR)</td>
<td>The percentage of people who view an item and then click it; calculated by dividing the number of clicks by the number of impressions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of visit (pageviews per session)</td>
<td>The average number of pageviews a visitor initiates before ending his session; calculated by dividing the total number of pageviews by the total number of sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First visit</td>
<td>The first visit from a visitor who has not previously visited the site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TABLE 1.1** Key Web Analytics Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hit</td>
<td>A request for a file from a web server. Note that a hit is <em>not</em> the same as a pageview; a single page can have multiple elements (images, text boxes, and so forth) that need to be individually loaded from the server. For example, a web page that includes four images would result in five hits to the server.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>A single display of an advertisement on a web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>A measurement of how often visitors come to a website, calculated by dividing the total number of sessions or visits by the total number of unique visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New visitor</td>
<td>A visitor who has not made previous visits to a website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pageview</td>
<td>A display of a complete web page. One visitor looking at a single page on your site generates one pageview. (Pageviews typically don’t include error pages, or those pages viewed by web crawlers or robots.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pageview duration (time on page)</td>
<td>The average amount of time that visitors spend on each page of a website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat visitor</td>
<td>A visitor who has made at least one previous visit to a website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session</td>
<td>A series of pageviews from the same visitor with no more than 30 minutes between pageviews—and with no visits to other sites between pageviews. Unlike a visit, a session ends when a visitor opens a page on another site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single page visit</td>
<td>A visit from a visitor where only a single page is viewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on site or length of visit</td>
<td>The average amount of time that visitors spend on a website each time they visit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Getting to Know Google Analytics**

There are many firms that offer web analytics tools and services. One of the most popular is Google Analytics, part of the vast Google empire. Google Analytics is unusually comprehensive in the metrics it tracks; it’s also relatively easy to use and completely free.

Because of its cost (or lack of), Google Analytics is popular with websites both large and small. Google Analytics is powerful enough to track traffic at large websites, but easy enough for smaller sites to implement. It tracks all the key metrics detailed in Table 1.1 and more, displaying its results in a series of “Dashboards” and custom reports, like the one shown in Figure 1.1.

---

### TABLE 1.1  Key Web Analytics Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique visitor</td>
<td>A visitor who visits your site one or more times within a given timeframe, typically a single 24-hour period; a visitor can make multiple visits during that timeframe, but this counts as just a single unique visitor. For example, a user visiting your site twice in one day is counted as a single unique visitor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit</td>
<td>A series of pageviews from the same visitor with no more than 30 minutes between each pageview. Unlike a session, a visit continues (for 30 minutes) even after a visitor leaves your site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE: PPC Metrics**

When tracking PPC ad performance, additional metrics come into play. These include cost-per-click (CPC), average position, conversions, conversion rate, and the like. (Learn more in Lesson 12, “Tracking Ecommerce.”)
Google Analytics utilizes onsite analytics to track visitor behavior on a specific site. After you register your site with Google Analytics, Google generates a unique piece of JavaScript code for your site. You then copy and paste this code into the underlying HTML of each site on your page you want to track; once embedded, this code tracks visitor behavior and transmits that data back to Google, where it is analyzed and displayed.

As noted, Google Analytics is completely free. There is no charge to track the performance of your website, nor to access the reports generated by Google Analytics.

**Summary**

In this lesson, you learned how web analytics works and why you should use this key metric to track visitor behavior on your website. In the next lesson, you learn how to sign up for the Google Analytics program.
Symbols

% Change (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
% exit key metric, 5
% new visits (Dashboard), 29
_addItem( ) function, 116
_addTrans( ) function, 114-116
_trackEvent( ) method, 141

A

A/B testing, 198-201
abandoned funnels, 137
absolute unique visitors (Visitors Overview), 53
Accept User Agreement page, 16
accessing
  AdSense, 91
  Dashboard, 27
accounts
  Google, 9-11
  Google Analytics, 11-13
action parameter (events), 140
Actions (Dashboard Sidebar), 27
actions
  defining, 139
  methods, 140
  tracking, 139-141
ad campaigns, 105
ad groups, 105
budgets, 105
charges, 106
keywords, 106
tracking, 107-109
ad networks. See AdSense
ad units, 92
Add a Gadget link, 18
Add “And” Statement link, 48
Add Another Page Version link, 199
Add “Or” Statement link, 48
adding
code to websites, 17-18
websites to Google Analytics, 15-16, 22-24
ads, tracking pay-per-click, 7
AdSense, 82
access, 91
explained, 91-93
performance, 93
revenue, 92, 99
website, 93
with Google Analytics, 93
AdSense Ads Clicked, 95
AdSense Ads Clicked/Visit, 95
AdSense CTR, 95
AdSense eCPM, 96
AdSense Page Impressions, 96
AdSense Page Impressions/Visit, 96
AdSense Revenue, 94
AdSense Revenue report, 99
AdSense Revenue/1000 Visits, 95
AdSense Unit Impressions, 96
AdSense Unit Impressions/Visit, 96
advertising, 4, 91
Advertising metrics, 146
AdWords
ad groups, 105
budget, 105
campaigns, 107-110
charges, 106
Google Analytics, 106-107
keywords, 106, 110
tracking, 16
AdWords Campaigns report, 108-109
All Traffic Sources report, 71, 189
analyzing
content, 79-80
navigation, 83-84
visitor loyalty, 62-63
visitor trends, 60-62
annotations
data points, 48-49
Show Starred, 50
viewing, 49
Average Order Value Report, 119
average pageviews, 53
Average time on site (Dashboard), 29
Avg Time on Site (Dashboard Sidebar), 26

B

basic testing, 198-201
benchmarking, 54-56
Benchmarking report, 55
benefits
Google Analytics, 7
web analytics, 1-2, 7-8
blog search, 124
Blogger, 18-20
blogs, tracking performance, 18-20
Bounce rate, 53, 193
  Dashboard Sidebar, 26
  key metric, 5
  metrics, 51
Site Usage Table (Dashboard), 29
broken links, 179-181
budget for AdWords, 105
building reports, 146

C
Calendar tab, 43
Campaigns, ad campaigns, 105-109
Categories Report, 121
category parameter (events), 140
changing session timeouts, 165
charts, motion charts, 152
checkmarks, green, 26
checkout pages, 194
click key metric, 5
click path key metric, 5
click-through rate (CTR), 95
click-through rate (CTR) key metric, 5
code
  Google Analytics, 17-18
  tracking code, 21, 163-165
Compare to Past, 43
comparing
date ranges, 43-44
metrics, 40-41
Completed Goals (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
Conducting A/B tests, 198, 201
Configure HTML/JavaScript window, 20
Configuring for search engines, 124-125
Contact Information page, 15
content
  AdSense, 97
  websites, 123-124
Content (Dashboard Sidebar), 34
content analysis, 79-80
Content Detail report, 184
Content dimensions, 147
Content Drilldown report, 86
Content metrics, 145
Content Overview (Dashboard), 33
Content Overview report, 80
Conversion Rate report, 119, 135
conversions
  Conversion Rate report, 135
  Goal Value report, 136
  Goal Verification report, 136
  goals, 131
  Reverse Goal Path report, 136
  Total Conversions report, 135
  tracking, 136

How can we make this index more useful? Email us at indexes@samspublishing.com
counting site visits, 51
Create and Apply to Report button, 48
Create My Account button, 11
Create New Annotation, 49
Create New Filter page, 157-159
Create New Website Profile page, 23
creating
  filters, 155-160
  reports, 148-150
CTR (click-through rate), 5, 95
custom filters, 157-160
Custom Reporting (Dashboard Sidebar), 35
custom reports
  building, 146
  creating, 148-150
  dimensions, 146-148
  metrics, 145-146
  saved, 153
  views, 150
Custom Search Engine, 124
custom types
  visitors to a specific page, 167-169
  visitors who click a specific link, 169
custom visitor segments, 46-48
customizing
  code, 163-165
  data, 39, 42, 45, 49

D
Dashboard (Google Analytics), 25-27, 31, 35
  accessing, 27
  custom segments, 46, 48
  customizing, 39, 42, 45, 49
  data points, 48-49
  date ranges, 43-44
  defaults, 39
  emailing, 36
  exporting, 35-36
  filtering, 44
  key statistics, 82
  Languages, 59
  Map Overlay, 31, 57
  metrics, 40-41
  Overview Graph, 27, 81-82
  reports. See reports
    (Dashboard Sidebar)
  Sidebar, 33, 35
  Site Usage Table, 29
top content, 82
viewing offline, 35-37
filters, 155
test, 202
tracked, 29
visualizing, 152
data fields, 146
reports, 146-148
versus metrics, 46
data points
annotating, 48-49
bars versus circles, 152
Date Range pane, 42-43
dates, 42-44
days, graphing by, 41
Days to Purchase report, 120
defining
events, 139
funnels, 133-134
goals, 132-133
parameters, 140
deleting filters, 161
depth of visit rate key metric, 5
Destination Pages report, 129
dimensions
reports, 146-148
versus metrics, 46
direct referrals, 165
direct traffic, 73-74
Direct Traffic report, 73
displaying
data, 29
URLs, 187
downloaded files, tracking, 183-184
dynamic IP addresses, 175

e
Ecommerce dimensions, 148
Ecommerce metrics, 146
ecommerce
purchase items, 116
reports, 118, 121
tracking, 113
Ecommerce Overview report, 118
ingiting
code, 164
filters, 161
graphs, 151
enabling
advertising, 91
benchmarking, 55
Entrance Keywords report, 85
entrance paths, 84
Entrance Paths report, 84
Entrance Sources report, 85
error pages
error page report, 181
tracking, 179-180
Event Tracking Actions reports, 143
Event Tracking Categories reports, 142
Event Tracking Hostnames reports, 143
Event Tracking Labels reports, 143
Event Tracking Overview reports, 141
Event Tracking Trending reports, 143
events, 139-141
exclude all traffic from a domain filter, 156
exclude all traffic from an IP address filter, 156
excluding yourself from site reports, 171
exit pages, 79, 192
exporting data, 35-37
deleting, 161
editing, 161
managing, 161
parameters, 158-159
first visit key metric, 5
fixing broken links, 181
folders to organize websites, 86
functions, 114-116
Funnel Visualization report, 137, 195
funnels
abandoned, 137
goals, 131-134
tracking, 136-137

G
General Information page, 15
Getting Started page, 11
Goal Abandoned Funnels report, 136
Goal Value report, 136
Goal Verification report, 136
goals
conversions, 131
defining, 132-133
explained, 131
funnels, 131-134
measuring, 134
multiple pages, 136
pages per visit, 132
time on site, 132
URL destination, 132-133

F
files, tracking downloaded, 183-184
Filter Manager page, 156, 159-161, 172-173, 188
filtering
results, 44
traffic
  by IP addresses, 171-174
  internal traffic, 171, 175-177
filters, 155
creating, 155, 157
custom, 157-160
Goals (Dashboard Sidebar), 35
Goals metrics, 146
Goals Overview report, 135
Goals Setting page, 134
Google accounts, 9-11
Google AdSense. See AdSense
Google AdWords. See AdWords
Google Analytics
  accounts, 11-13
  AdSense, 93
  AdWords, 106-107
  benefits, 7
  code, 17-18
  Dashboard. See Dashboard
  websites, 15-16, 22-24
Google Analytics Overview
  page, 23
Google Website Optimizer, 197
Graph By, 41
Graph Mode pane, 40
graphs, editing, 151
green checkmark, 26

H–I–J
hit key metric, 6
I Want to Track AdWords
  Campaigns, 24
impression key metric, 6
improving weaknesses of
  websites, 4
include only traffic to a
  subdirectory filter, 156
Intelligence (Dashboard
  Sidebar), 33
internal traffic, 171, 175-177
IP addresses, 171-175

K–L
key metrics, 5-7
key statistics (Dashboard), 82
keywords, 72
  AdWords, 110
  as direct referrals, 165
  Entrance Keywords report,
    85
Keywords report, 72
label parameter (events), 140
landing page optimization, 84-85
landing pages, 79
  viewing, 193-194
  visitors, 168
limitations of Site Overlay
  report, 103
linking AdWords to Google
  Analytics, 106-107
links, broken, 179-181
loyalty of visitors, analyzing,
  62-63
loyalty key metric, 6

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M–N–O

Manage Custom Reports page, 148, 153
managing filters, 161
Map Overlay (Dashboard), 31, 57
mapping visitors by region, 57-58
measuring
  goals, 134
  website traffic, 1
methods
  events, 140
  _trackEvent( ), 141
metrics
  bounce rate, 51
  comparing, 40-41
  goal conversions, 131
  key metrics, 5-7
  reports, 145-146
  sorting by, 151
  time on site, 51
  versus dimensions, 46
mobile visitors, 66
months, graphing by, 41
motion charts, 152
multivariate testing, 198
Name (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
navigation analysis, 83-84
navigation paths, tracking, 136
Navigation Summary report, 83
new visitor key metric, 6
new visitors, 51, 58-59
new visits, 53
offsite web analytics, 3
onsite web analytics, 3
optimizing
  landing pages, 84-85
  websites, 79
organization of websites by folders, 86
Overview Graph (Dashboard), 27, 81-82
overview graphs, 52, 151

P

Page Depth is greater than or equal to 2, 46
pages
  Accept User Agreement, 16
  bounce rates, 193
  checkout pages, 194
  Contact Information, 15
  Create New Filter, 157-159
  error pages, 179-180
  exit pages, 192
  Filter Manager, 156, 159-161, 172-173, 188
  General Information, 15
  Goal Settings, 134
  landing pages, 193-194
  multiple pages, 136
  poor performers, 191
page tagging (onsite web analytics), 3
troubleshooting, 197
versions, 197
Website Optimizer, 198, 202
pages per visit goals, 132
Pages/Visit (Dashboard), 29
pageTracker, 164
pageviews
  pageview duration key metric, 6
  pageview key metric, 6
  pageviews per session key metric, 5
percentage versus totals, 192
Site Usage Table (Dashboard), 29
virtual, 180, 183
Visitors Overview, 53
parameters
  defining, 140
  filters, 158-159
  query, 125
pay-per-click advertising (PPC), 7, 91
PDF data
  emailing, 36
  exporting, 35
percentage versus totals (pageviews), 192
performance of AdSense, tracking, 93
performance
  blogs, 18-20
  poor performers (pages), 191
  websites, 27
Product Overview report, 120
Product SKUs report, 121
Profile Settings page, 21
progress of goals, measuring, 134
purchase items, 116
Q–R
query parameters for search engines, 125
ranges of dates, 42-44
reasons for content analysis, 79-80
referred traffic, 74
Referring Sites report, 74
referring URLs, 187-189
regenerating tracking code, 21
region, mapping visitors by, 57-58
repeat visitors
  repeat visitor key metric, 6
  tracking, 51, 58-59
reporting sales data, 114-116
reports (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
  AdSense Overview, 94-97
  AdSense Revenue, 99
  AdWords Campaigns, 108-109

How can we make this index more useful? Email us at indexes@samspublishing.com
All Traffic Sources, 71, 189
Average Order Value, 119
Benchmarking, 55
building, 146
Categories, 121
Content Detail, 184
Content Drilldown, 86
Content Overview, 33, 80
Conversion Rate, 119, 135
creating, 148-150
days to purchase, 120
destination pages, 129
dimensions, 146-148
direct traffic, 73
eCommerce, 118, 121
eCommerce Overview, 118
Entrance Keywords, 85
Entrance Paths, 84
Entrance Sources, 85
error page, 181
Event Tracking Actions, 143
Event Tracking Categories, 142
Event Tracking Hostnames, 143
Event Tracking Labels, 143
Event Tracking Overview, 141
Event Tracking Trending, 143
Funnel Visualization, 137, 195
Goal Abandoned Funnels, 136
Goal Value, 136
Goal Verification, 136
Goals Overview, 135
Keywords, 72
metrics, 145-146
Navigation Summary, 83
Product Overview, 120
Product SKUs, 121
Referring Sites, 74
Reverse Goal Path, 136
saved, 153
Search Engines, 75
Search Terms, 128-129
Site Overlay, 101-103
site reports, 171
Site Search, 125, 129
Site Search Categories, 129
Site Search Overview, 125, 127
Site Search Trending, 129
Site Search Usage, 127
Start Pages, 129
Top AdSense Content, 97
Top AdSense Referrers, 98
Top Exit Pages, 90, 192
Top Landing Pages, 88, 193
total conversions, 135
total revenue, 119
Traffic Sources Overview, 31, 70-72
Transactions, 119
TV Campaigns, 111
User Defined, 167-169
views, 150
Visitor Trending, 61
Visitors Overview, 30, 52-54
Visits to Purchase, 120
results, filtering, 44
revenue trends, 99
Reverse Goal Path report, 136

sales data
  reporting, 114-116
  tracking, 116-117, 120
saved Custom Reports, 153
search engines
  configuring for, 124-125
  query parameters, 125
  tracking, 165
  traffic, 75-76
Search Engines report, 75
Search Terms report, 128-129
searching
  content, 123-124
  profiles, 27
Select the Calendar tab, 42
selecting views, 151
session timeouts, changing, 165
session key metric, 6
Set Up Email page, 36
Show Starred, 50
Sidebar (Dashboard), 33-35
single page visit key metric, 6
Site Overlay report, 101-103
site reports, excluding yourself, 171
site search, 123-124
Site Search Categories report, 129
Site Search Overview report, 125-127
Site Search reports, 125, 129
Site Search Trending report, 129
Site Search Usage report, 127
Site Usage metrics, 145
Site Usage Table (Dashboard), 29
site visits, counting, 51
sorting
  by metrics, 151
  visitors by landing page, 168
star icon, 50
Start Pages report, 129
Status (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
Systems dimensions, 148

Techie Guide to Google Website Organizer, The, 201
technical profile, 54
test data, viewing, 202
testing
  A/B, 198, 201
  multivariate, 198
  pages, 197
third-party shopping cart, 116-117

How can we make this index more useful? Email us at indexes@samspublishing.com
time on page key metric (pageview duration), 6
time on site, 53
goals, 132
metrics, 6, 51
timeouts, 165
top AdSense content, 97
top AdSense referrers, 98
top content (Dashboard), 82
top exit pages, 90, 192
Top Exit Pages report, 90, 192
top landing pages, 88, 193
top pages, 85, 88
Total Conversions report, 135
Total Revenue report, 119
tracking
ads, 7
AdSense performance, 93
AdWords, 16, 110
blogs, 18-20
conversions, 136
data, 29
ecommerce, 113
events, 139-141
files, 183-184
funnels, 136-137
goals, 136-137
navigation paths, 136
pages, 179-180
sales, 116-117, 120
search engines, 165
URLs, 187-189
visitors, 51, 58-59, 167-170
with web analytics, 3
tracking code
customizing, 163-165
editing, 164
regenerating, 21
traffic
direct traffic, 73-74
filtering, 171-174
internal traffic, 171, 175-177
referred traffic, 74
search engines, 75-76
sources, 69-70
websites, 1
Traffic Sources (Dashboard Sidebar), 34
Traffic Sources dimensions, 147
Traffic Sources Overview (Dashboard), 31, 70-72
Transactions Report, 119
trends
events, 143
revenue, 99
searches, 129
visitors, 60-62
web analytics, 4
troubleshooting websites, 197
TV campaigns, 110-111
U–V
unique visitors, 7, 51
URL destination goals, 132-133
Index

User Defined reports, 167-169
Using Blogger, 20
Using Google AdWords and AdSense, 93, 106
value parameter (events), 140
versions of pages, 197
viewing
  AdSense revenue trends, 99
  annotations, 49
  checkout pages, 194
  custom reports, 150
  landing pages, 193-194
  test data, 202
  top AdSense content, 97
  top AdSense referrers, 98
  top exit pages, 192
  URLs, 189
virtual pageviews, 180, 183
visit key metric, 7
Visitor Tracking, 51
Visitor Trending (Dashboard), 61
Visitor Type matches exactly New Visitor AND Time on Page is greater than 5, 46
visitors
  browsers, 63-65
  by region, 57-58
  custom types, 167-169
  direct traffic, 73-74
  from search engines, 75-76
  languages, 59
  loyalty, 62-63
  mobile, 66
network properties, 65
new versus repeat, 51, 58-59
referred traffic, 74
segmentation, 46-48, 54
sorting by landing page, 168
statistics, 54-56
tracking, 51, 167-170
trends, 60-62
unique visitors, 51
versus visits, 51
Visitors (Dashboard Sidebar), 34
Visitors dimensions, 147
Visitors Overview (Dashboard), 30, 52-54
visitors to a specific page customer type, 167-169
visits
  versus visitors, 51
  Visitors Overview, 52
Visits (Dashboard Sidebar), 26
Visits to Purchase report, 120
visualizing data, 152

W–Z

weaknesses of websites, 4
web analytics, 1-4, 7-8
Website Optimizer page, 198, 202
websites
  ad units, 92
  AdSense, 93
  advertising, 91

How can we make this index more useful? Email us at indexes@samspublishing.com
content, 123-124
entrance paths, 84
exit pages, 79
Google Analytics, 15-16, 22-24
landing pages, 79, 84-85
optimizing, 79
organization, 86
performance overview, 27
sales data, 114-116
strategies, 4
strengths, 4
top exit pages, 90
top landing pages, 88
top pages, 85, 88
traffic, 1
troubleshooting, 197
usage, 1
visitors, 1
weaknesses, 4
weeks, graphing by, 41

XML data, 36