

Michael Miller

Sams **Teach Yourself**

# Google Analytics™

in **10**  
**Minutes**

**SAMS**

## **Sams Teach Yourself Google Analytics™ in 10 Minutes**

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# 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 1.1** Key Web Analytics Metrics

Metric	Description
% exit	The percentage of users who exit from a given web page as a share of pageviews.
Bounce rate	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.
Click	A single instance of a visitor clicking a link from one page to another on the same site.
Click path	The sequence of clicks that website visitors follow on a given site.
Click-through rate (CTR)	The percentage of people who view an item and then click it; calculated by dividing the number of clicks by the number of impressions.
Depth of visit (pageviews per session)	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.
First visit	The first visit from a visitor who has not previously visited the site.

**TABLE 1.1** Key Web Analytics Metrics

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Description</b>
Hit	A request for a file from a web server. Note that a hit is <i>not</i> 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.
Impression	A single display of an advertisement on a web page.
Loyalty	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.
New visitor	A visitor who has not made previous visits to a website.
Pageview	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.)
Pageview duration (time on page)	The average amount of time that visitors spend on each page of a website.
Repeat visitor	A visitor who has made at least one previous visit to a website.
Session	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.
Single page visit	A visit from a visitor where only a single page is viewed.
Time on site or length of visit	The average amount of time that visitors spend on a website each time they visit.

**TABLE 1.1** Key Web Analytics Metrics

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Description</b>
Unique visitor	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.
Visit	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.

**NOTE: PPC Metrics**

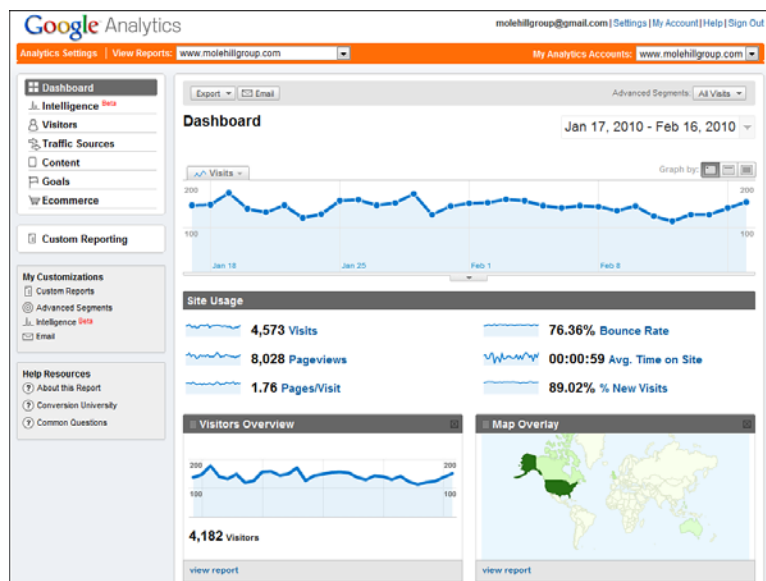
When tracking PPC ad performance, additional metrics come into play. These include cost-per-click (CPC), average position, conversions, conversion rate, and the like. (Learn more in Lesson 12, “Tracking Ecommerce.”)

## 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.





**FIGURE 1.1** The main Google Analytics Dashboard.

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.

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