



HOW TO APPLY ANALYTICS DATA

To Make Better Content Marketing Decisions



AS A CONTENT MARKETER you should be well-versed in analytics, no matter what your specific roles and responsibilities are in working with the discipline. Without analytics, you have no way of knowing whether or not the work you do is helping your business achieve its desired results, or how to make adjustments to keep your program running in top condition.

However, we realize not every content marketer is comfortable working with numbers at all, let alone truly deciphering what all those figures, charts, and setting options really mean; so many simply dump the data they receive into a spreadsheet, chart, or graph, and hope that the trend lines continue to go “up, and to the right,” rather than down.

But by skipping the analysis process, content marketers are wasting a tremendously valuable source of insights. Data in its raw form has no impact on your marketing outcomes — it’s just an observation of actions that have already taken place. Yet, the data in the Google Analytics reports you generate can be used to tell a much richer, more informative story about your content and about the people who are consuming it. It can also reveal specific actions you should be taking to drive better results — you just need to know how to translate it into the answers you need.



In an informative presentation he delivered at Content Marketing World, [Orbit Media](#) founder Andy Crestodina explained that the best way to use analytics is as a decision-support tool — a way of answering your key questions about what’s working, how well it’s working, and what actions you should take as a result. And it all starts with a simple, five-step process:

- 1. Formulate an idea about your content performance.**
- 2. Determine a question you can ask to support this idea.**
- 3. Create the report that will provide the appropriate data to answer that question.**
- 4. Take action based on your analysis of that data.**
- 5. Measure the results of the actions you take against the baseline data you initially gathered.**

To understand how the process works — and learn how you can use it to take greater control over the performance of your content marketing — let’s take a look at some of the top insights we learned from Andy’s presentation.



In his presentation, Andy explained that Google Analytics reports can be separated into four primary categories. Each one is the key to understanding certain insights that impact the performance of the content marketing you publish on your website. Andy calls them the AABCs:

- **Audience:** Who are your site visitors?
- **Acquisition:** Where did they come from?
- **Behavior:** What are they doing on your site?
- **Conversions:** How well is your content working?

Let's take a look at some possible questions you may have in each category, the reports you can use to find the answers, and how you can apply the data they contain to determine what actions might help you improve your content's performance.

REMEMBER: Tracking and analyzing your performance data is not a one-time task: You will need to revisit these reports to ensure that the actions you take are producing positive results and are accounting for any new trends and tactics that may impact your content's performance.

To make the process easier, we've created a handy chart of all the questions, reports, and analysis tips we discuss here — you'll find it on page 24. Keep it on hand and refer to it as part of your regular evaluation and optimization processes.





Audience Reports

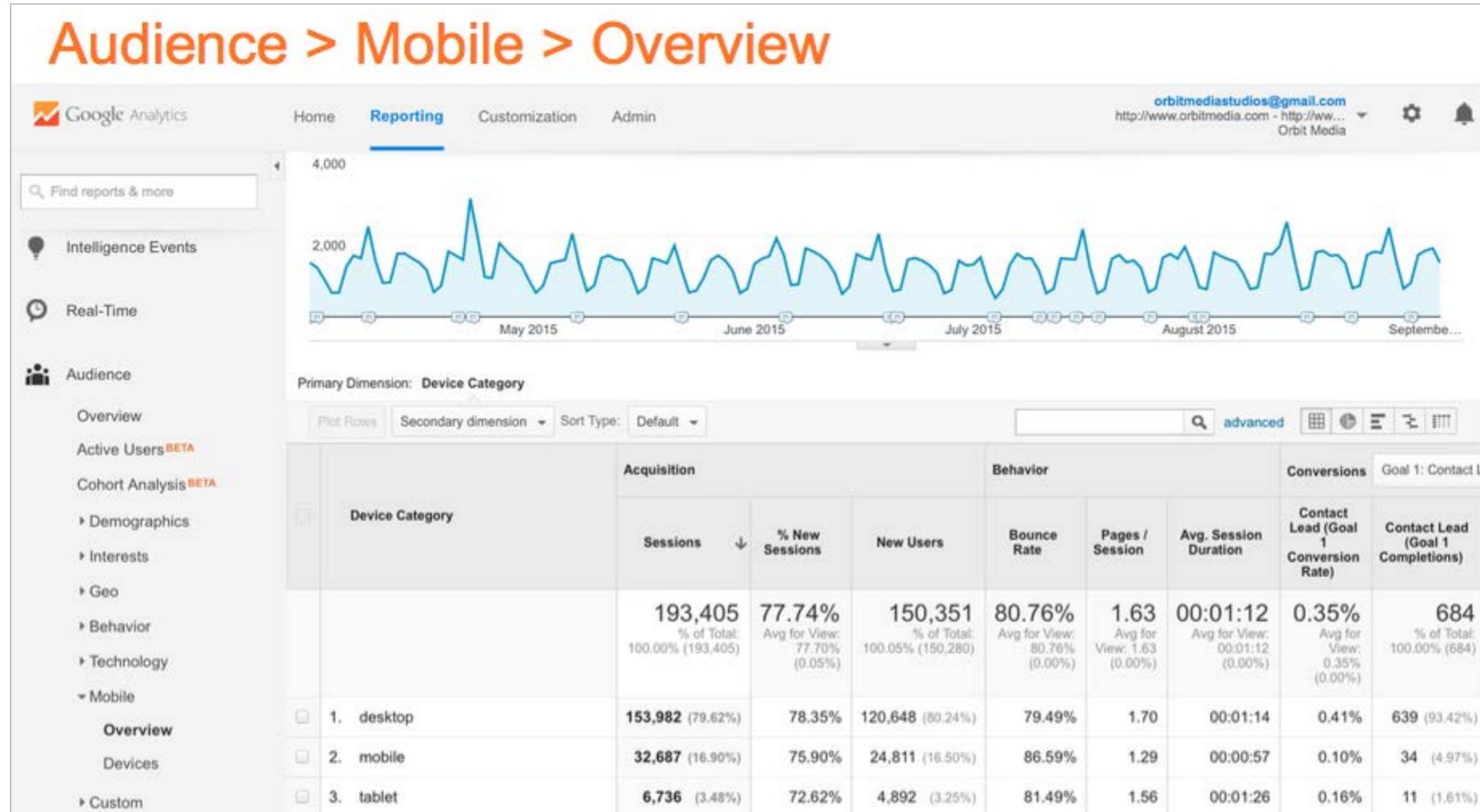
These reports can help you characterize the members of your audience in terms of their demographic profiles, their interests and affinities, the technology (i.e., devices and browsers) they use to interact with your site content, and more.

Following are some samples of audience-related questions you might have about your content. For each one, Andy shares which report he recommends you review to find the answer (the path to access the report is provided in parentheses), and suggests some actions you may want to take as a result:



Question: Are visitors using mobile devices to access our site?

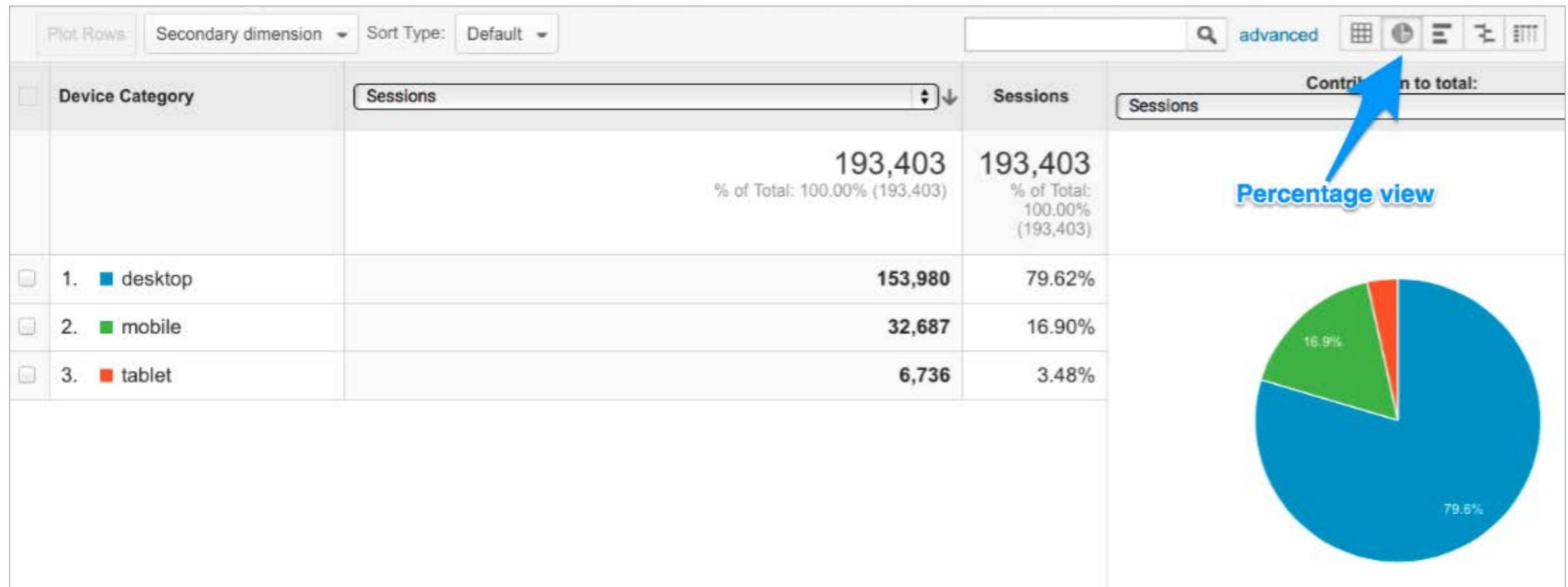
Report to generate: Mobile Overview (Audience >> Mobile >> Overview)



This report shows the number of sessions (aka visits) that took place using a mobile device. In the example above, almost 17% of sessions were conducted via mobile.



Bonus tip: In many Google Analytics reports, you can click on the Percentage View button to see how the data in your query compares to other options in its category. For example, in this case, the Percentage View pie chart displays mobile usage as it compares with desktop and tablet use.



Question: Are mobile visitors less engaged than visitors on other platforms?

Report to generate: Mobile Overview

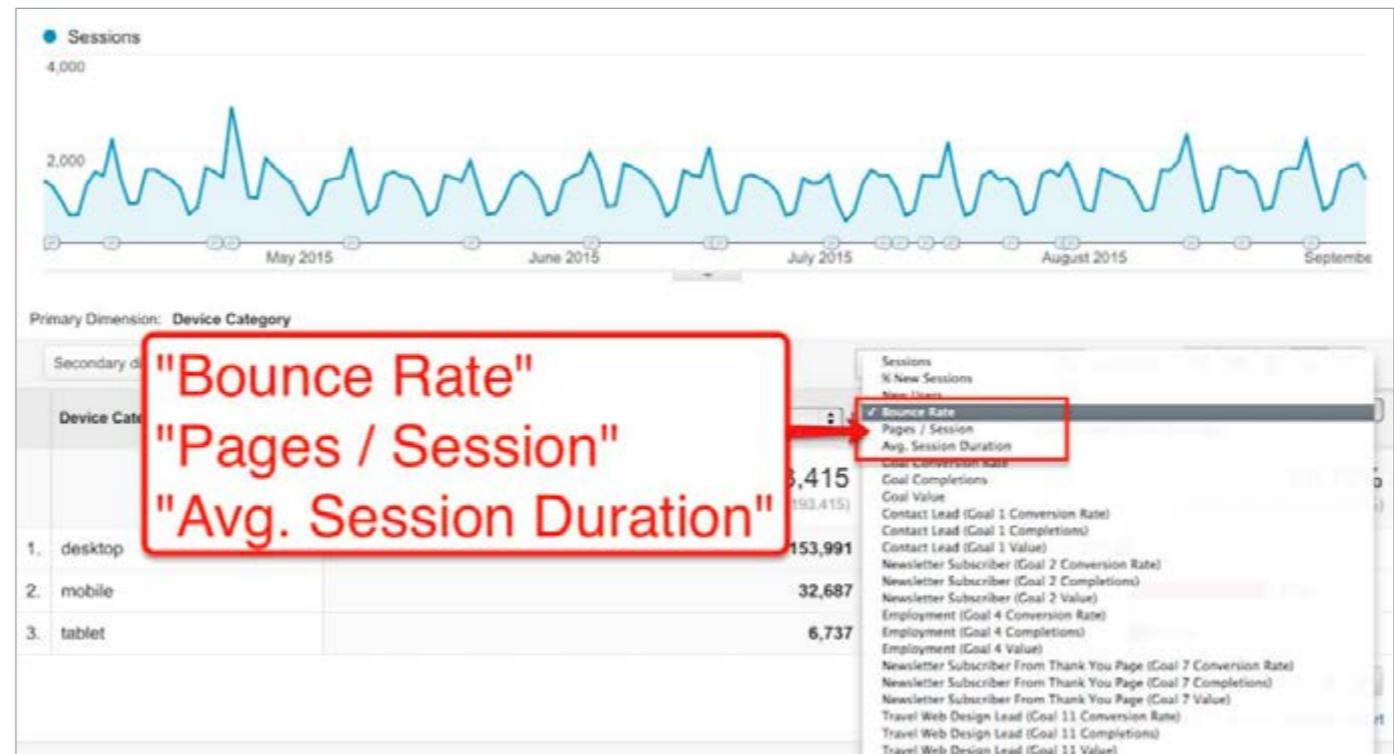
(Audience >> Mobile >> Overview; click on the Comparison View option)

As with the Percentage View button, clicking on Comparison View enables you to clearly see how mobile visitors compare to other platforms in terms of the engagement indicator you select, such as bounce rates, pages per session, or average session duration.

Sample analysis: If your bounce rates are extremely high among your mobile users, it could mean you need to better optimize your user experience on mobile.

Suggested actions:

- Create a schedule for regular mobile testing.
- Check the design of your website landing pages to see if they are optimized for mobile visitors.



Bonus tip: You want the data you collect to be an accurate reflection of your visitors' actions. So don't forget to filter out traffic from your own team members accessing your content. This can skew your data and, thus, affect the accuracy of your analyses.

To do this, go into the user settings in Google Analytics and create a filter for your IP addresses.

Add Filter to View

Choose method to apply filter to view

Create new Filter
 Apply existing Filter

Filter Information

Filter Name
My Office

Filter Type
Predefined Custom

Exclude traffic from the IP addresses Select expression

IP address
e.g. 74.125.19.103 or 2001:db8::1 (for IPv6)

Filter Verification ?
Analytics cannot provide a preview for this filter: previews for advanced filters and location-based filters (e.g. IP address, Country) are not supported at this time.

Save Cancel

Question: What is the most common path visitors take through our site?

Report to generate: Behavior Flow (Audience >> Users Flow)

Analyzing the flow of user behaviors provides insights on whether site visitors are finding what they came for, and where they might be diverging from the path to conversion that you have laid out.

Clicking on the green box for your home page (or any of the top pages of your site) will give you several options:

- *Highlight traffic* through the page, which displays the traffic for that page while still showing other pages
- *Explore traffic* through the page, which removes traffic data for all other pages
- *Group Details*, which displays more information on the top pages comprising that group.



From there, you can discover the top path visitors take after arriving on that page, and can determine whether or not the traffic flow aligns with the navigation path you intend for them to follow.

Note: This report can require a bit of explanation if you aren't familiar with how to find and interpret the data. For a full tutorial on how to create and analyze this report, check out [Orbit Media's post](#) on the topic.

Sample analysis: Any “wrong turns” on the path could indicate a need to make it easier for visitors to navigate to the content they want most, or to highlight your highest value/best-performing content to keep them engaged and motivate them to explore your site in more detail.

Suggested actions: If data shows that visitors are failing to make progress along your intended conversion path, you have a few optimization options:

- If visitors are frequently moving from Page A to pages with high drop-off rates, you can clean up Page A and eliminate links to those irrelevant pages.
- Alternately, you can optimize Page A by reconsidering the navigation features, internal links, and calls to action you include, so that your desired path is more visually prominent to visitors.





Acquisition Reports

These reports provide insights into the ways visitors are finding your site content, including channel sources, SEO data, and social media referrals. For example:

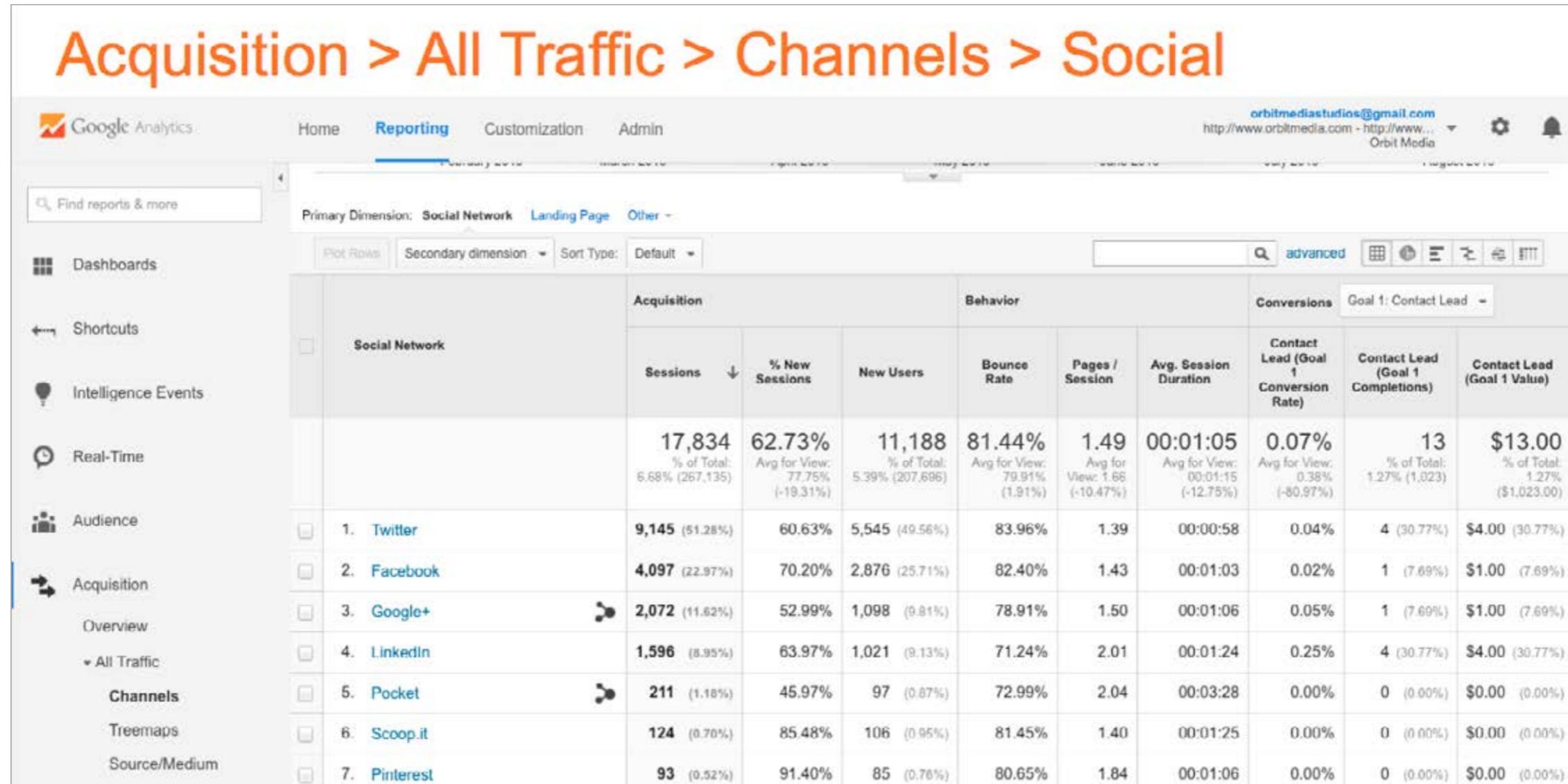
- Did they arrive via search or social media?
- What social channels drive the most traffic to our site?
- Is there a particular piece of content that drives site visits at a significantly higher rate than other campaigns?
- Are we ranking for the keywords that are most important to our business?

Take a look at some ways to analyze the data found in Acquisition Reports to inform your decisions on your content's SEO efforts, lead generation, resource allocations, and more:



Question: Which of our social channels is driving the most traffic to our site content?

Report to generate: Channel Report (Acquisition >> All Traffic >> Channels)



Click on “social” in the list of channel groupings to see a breakdown of your site traffic by platform (shown above). You can also click on Percentage View to view the data in pie chart format, for easier comparison.



Question: Which social network drives the best traffic to our site?

Report to generate: Channel Report

(Acquisition >> All Traffic >> Channels, filtered by goal)

When considering traffic from your social networks, “best” channels are those that convert visitors at a higher rate. So you will need to view the data that relates to the specific conversion goals you want to measure performance against. As you can see in the sample report below, LinkedIn had the highest conversion rate of the four most popular social channels.

Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels > Social

Social Network	Acquisition		Behavior		Conversions		
	Visits	% of Total	Visits	% of Total	Goal 2: Newsletter Subscriber (Goal 2 Conversion Rate)	Newsletter Subscriber (Goal 2 Completions)	Newsletter Subscriber (Goal 2 Value)
1. Twitter	4,097	(22.87%)	2,876	(25.71%)	0.75%	134	\$134.00
2. Facebook	2,072	(11.82%)	1,098	(9.81%)	0.69%	63	\$63.00
3. Google+	1,596	(8.95%)	1,021	(9.13%)	1.06%	22	\$22.00
4. LinkedIn	211	(1.18%)	97	(0.87%)	1.25%	20	\$20.00
5. Pocket	124	(0.70%)	106	(0.95%)	2.42%	3	\$3.00
6. Scoop.int	93	(0.52%)	85	(0.76%)	0.00%	0	\$0.00
7. Pinterest	75	(0.42%)	71	(0.63%)	0.00%	0	\$0.00
8. Stack Overflow							

Sample analysis: In order for this report to provide the insights you want, you will first need to set up your conversion goals (for example, subscribing to your newsletter, downloading an e-book, or completing a lead-gen form) in Google Analytics, so the system knows what specific user actions you want your content marketing to drive and can provide data on how successful your content is at meeting that goal (see Sidebar, below, for instructions on setting up a goal).

Suggested action:

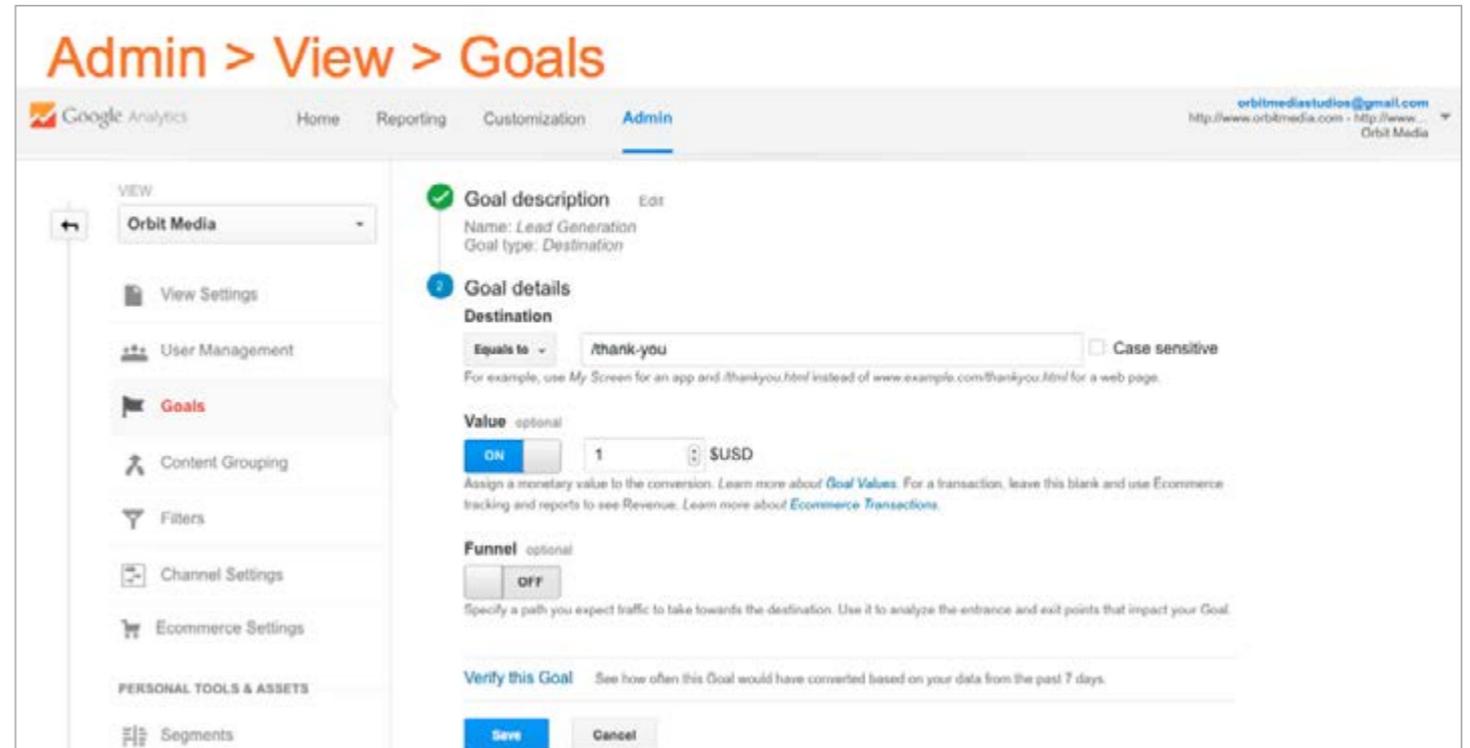
- Adjust your content resources to place a greater focus on creating content for the social channels that are converting at the highest rates.



Setting up a goal in Google Analytics

Customizing your Google Analytics account to be able to track and measure desired visitor actions on your site is relatively easy; here's how to get started:

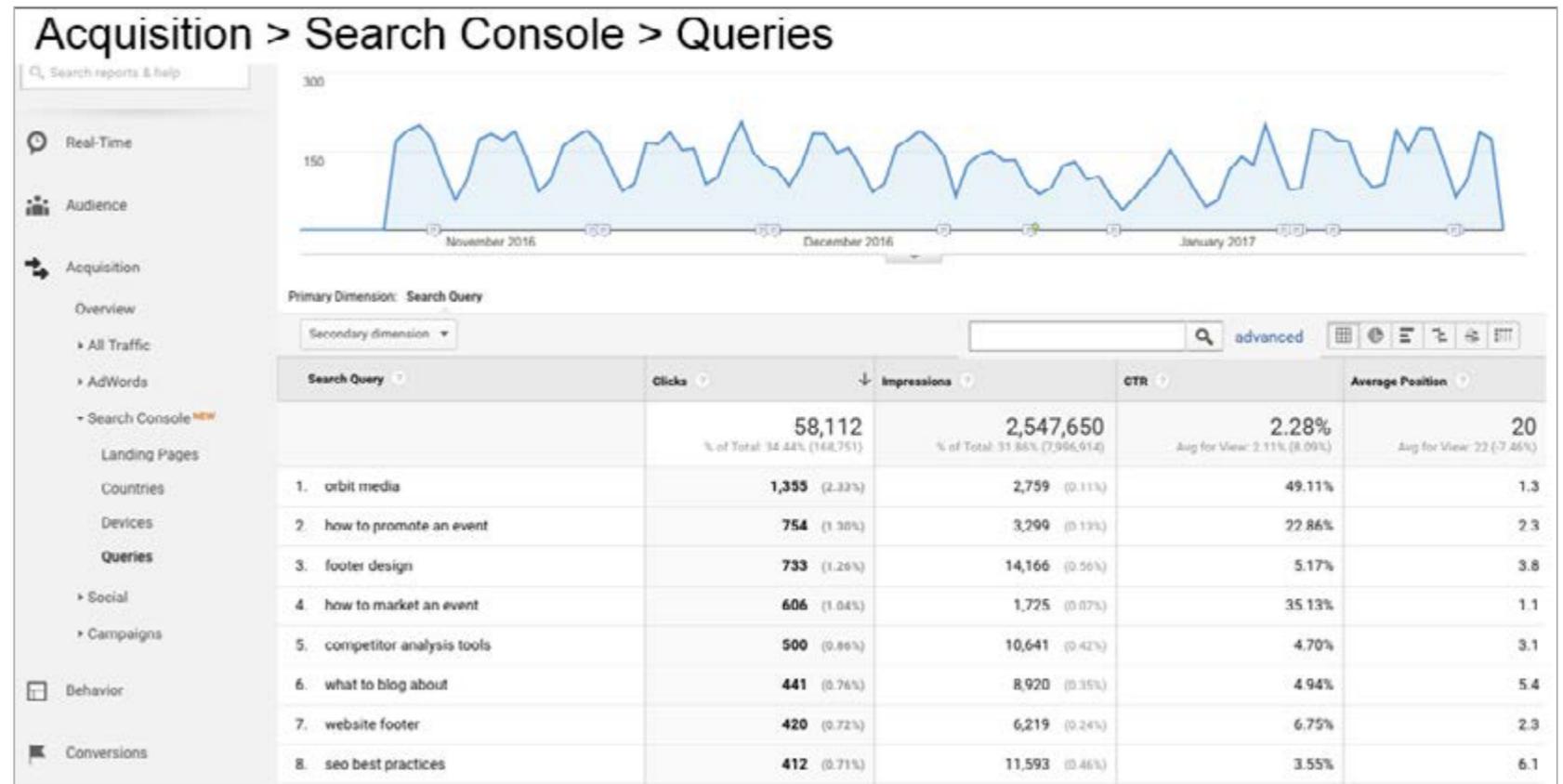
- You will need full Admin access to be able to add, remove, or edit a goal in your site's Google Analytics account. If your account has not been given full access to these account settings, ask your IT team to grant you access.
- In your user settings, click on **Admin >> View >> Goals**. Enter a description for your conversion goal, including its name and type of goal. For example, if your goal is to generate leads, Google Analytics will need to track how many site visitors reached the target destination — i.e., the thank you page they arrive on once they have submitted a completed lead form.
- Each time this target destination page is accessed, it signals Google Analytics to record the session as a conversion. So for each goal you configure, you will also need to enter a unique URL for the confirmation page that's associated with completion of this goal.
- Additionally, you should set a monetary value for each goal, which will enable you to compare its ROI to that of other goals you want to measure. This can be an estimate of the specific dollar value for people who complete that goal, or just an arbitrary value of \$1.



Question: For which keyword phrases are we ranking?

Report to generate: Queries Report (Acquisition >> Search Console >> Queries)

GA can be incredibly useful when it comes to determining how well your SEO strategy is working. For example, you can get a quick view of your ranking for the top keywords in your industry, which can help you identify how easy it is for your target audience to discover your content.

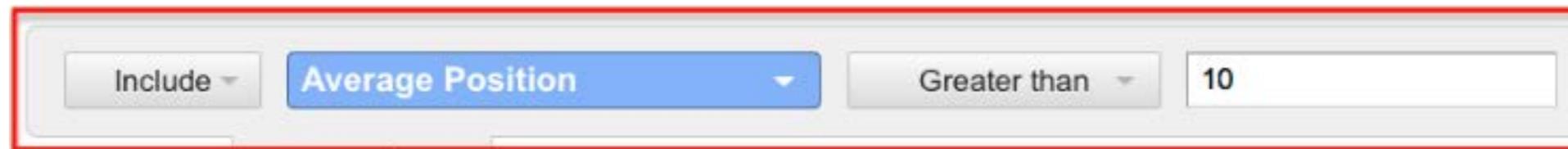


Note: You will first need to connect your Google Analytics account to Google Search Console, so the two can share data. Follow these [step-by-step instructions](#) to configure your Admin settings, and learn more about the additional reports this enables.



Bonus tip: To find out the phrases for which you rank — but not on the first page — you can use an Advanced filter to show only the phrases for which you rank highly on the second page of search results.

To do this on your Queries report, click on the Advanced settings button, then Add a Dimension to your query. Choose the dimension settings from the drop-down menus, as illustrated below:



Suggested action:

- Sorting the results by Average Position will provide you with a list of phrases for which you rank at position 11 or below (i.e., page 2 of a Google SERP), indicating the keywords for which you may want to optimize your site pages — e.g., by adding detail, creating additional content related to those keywords, adding videos that are tagged with those keywords, increasing the internal links you include in your content, etc.



Behavior Reports

These reports provide useful data that characterizes how visitors arrived on your site, what they came to find, what paths they take in search of the information, and how successful your content is at providing the information they seek. Analyzing data such as bounce rates, time spent on the site after searching, and what page they visited before exiting your site can reveal insights that can guide your decisions on improving your site's user experience, or on the content you are publishing.



Question: What are people looking for on our site?

Report to generate: Site Search Report (Behavior >> Site Search >> Search Terms)

Using this report, you can get a sense of what information visitors are looking to get when they arrive on your site. In addition, by adding Exit Page as a secondary dimension, you can see which page those visitors were on when they left your site. If a visitor leaves from the same page on which they first arrived, it may mean they aren't finding what they wanted or expected to get from your site.

Bonus tip: This report can also be used to determine the usefulness of your own site search tools. If visitors are frequently exiting from the search results page on your site, you may want to optimize your pages so that your on-site searches deliver more accurate results.

Suggested actions:

- Optimize your navigation to help visitors find what they are looking for more easily.
- Publish additional content on topics related to popular keyword searches.

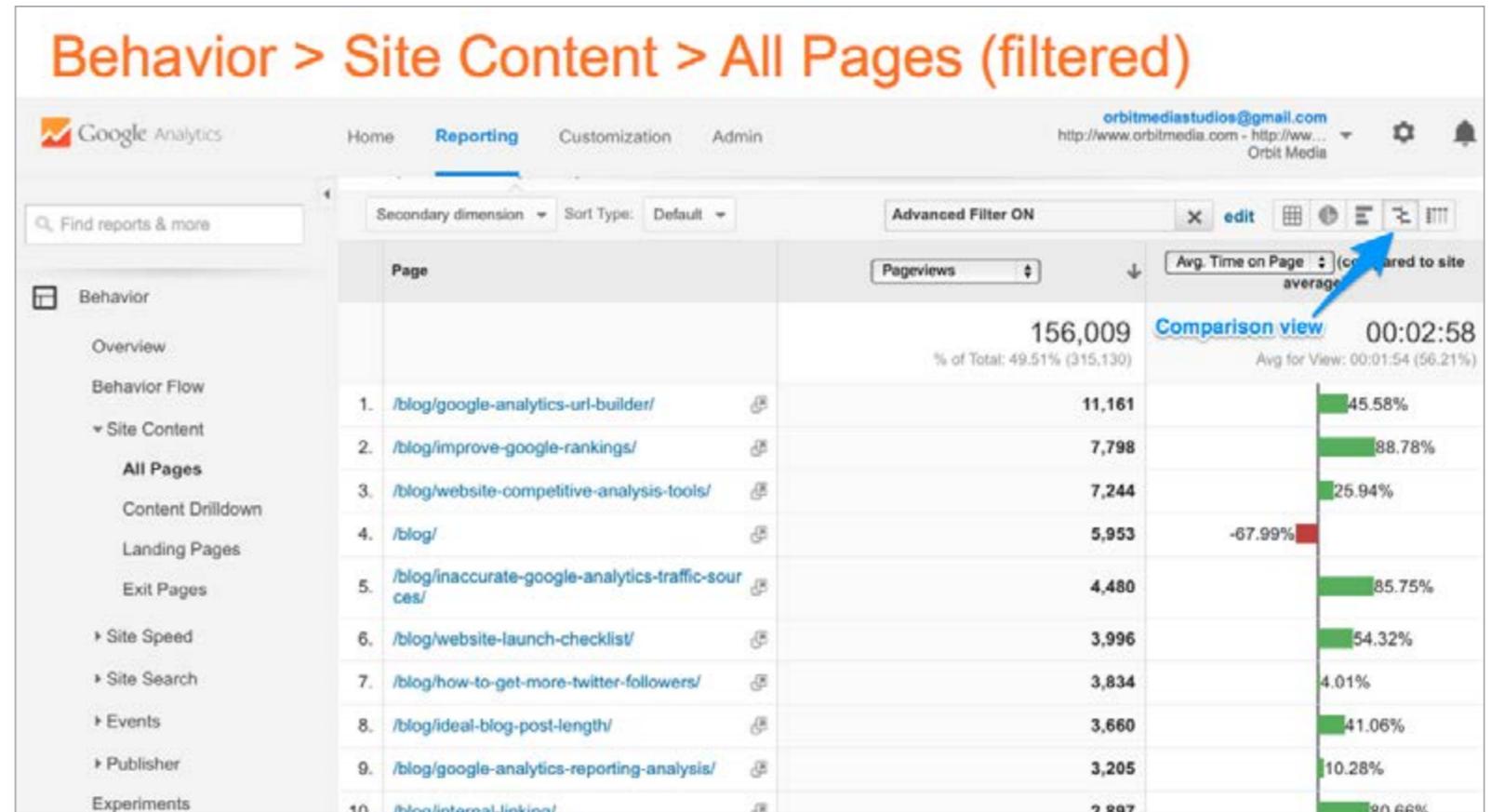
The screenshot shows the Google Analytics interface for a Site Search Report. The left sidebar lists navigation options under 'Behavior', with 'Site Search' > 'Search Terms' selected. A dropdown menu is open, showing dimensions like 'App ID', 'App Installer ID', 'App Name', 'App Version', 'Destination Page', 'Exit Page', and 'Exit Screen'. The main table displays search terms and their corresponding exit pages.

Search Term	Exit Page	Total Unique Searches
		3,680 % of Total: 94.82% (3,881)
4. spain	/china-the-sleeping-giant-is-wide-awake	53 (1.44%)
5. discoverer	/japan-revealed-shrines-treasures-geishas-gardens	24 (0.65%)
6. china	/morocco-as-time-went-by-a-journey-in-three-parts	24 (0.65%)
7. india	/moorish-to-modern-spain	23 (0.62%)
8. peru	/search-pages-21.php?go=	21 (0.57%)
	/search-pages-21.php?go=	19 (0.52%)
	/exuberant-india-treasure-trove-of-color-majesty-soul	19 (0.52%)
	/perusing-peru-sunrise-sunset-over-machu-picchu-included	17 (0.46%)

Question: Which of our blog posts are the most engaging to visitors?

Report to generate: All Pages Report (Behavior >> Site Content >> All Pages filtered for blog posts)

If your site page URLs are categorized by content type (e.g., if the word “blog” appears in the URL of every blog post), you can use the search filter on the All Pages report to view only the data that’s related to your blog posts. Then, clicking on Comparison View will enable you to see relative engagement data for your blog posts.



Suggested actions:

- High relative engagement can also be used to discover the topics that visitors find most engaging — indicating that you should create more content on those topics.
- Link from high-traffic posts to high-converting posts.





Conversion Reports

These reports may be the most critical to analyze, as the results can reveal whether or not your content is helping your business achieve its marketing goals, and which content efforts are leading to the greatest levels of success.



Question: Which posts support conversion at the highest rate?

Report to generate: All Pages Report

(Behavior >> Site Content >> All Pages, filtered for blog posts)

While the Page Value chart will show you at which rate each post contributes to the conversion goals you've set for your GA account, it's difficult to support a decision with the small, fractional values it displays. The best way to determine this information is to combine this data with data from the Reverse Goal Path Report (see the next page for more on this), which shows you the posts that are supporting the most conversions, and at what rate.

Behavior > Site Content > All Pages (filtered)

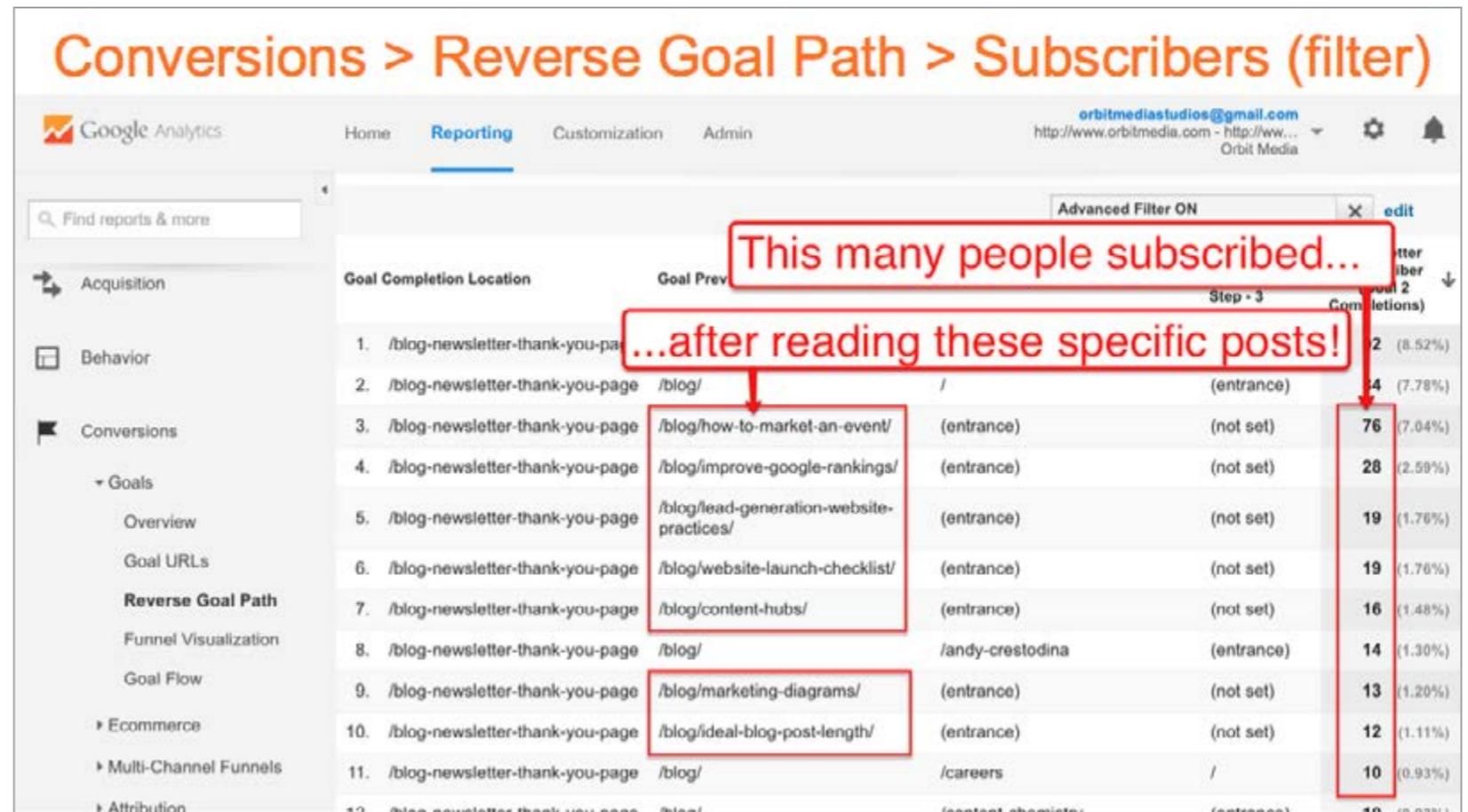
Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Entrances	Bounce Rate	% Exit	Page Value
1. /blo	195,021	171,972	00:03:14	150,699	87.69%	77.37%	\$0.01
2. /blo						85.26%	<\$0.01
3. /blo						85.68%	<\$0.01
4. /blog/website-competitive-analysis-tools/	7,244 (3.71%)	5,545 (3.22%)	00:03:45	5,528 (3.67%)	81.98%	74.53%	<\$0.01
5. /blog/start-conversation-online/	5,974 (3.06%)	5,608 (3.26%)	00:06:50	5,586 (3.71%)	94.25%	93.25%	\$0.00
6. /blog/	5,953 (3.05%)	4,708 (2.74%)	00:00:57	1,530 (1.02%)	47.06%	28.12%	\$0.06
7. /blog/inaccurate-google-analytics-traffic-sources/	4,480 (2.30%)	4,274 (2.49%)	00:05:31	4,130 (2.74%)	93.92%	91.96%	<\$0.01
8. /blog/website-launch-checklist/	3,996 (2.05%)	3,645 (2.12%)	00:04:35	3,305 (2.19%)	86.60%	81.78%	<\$0.01
9. /blog/how-to-get-more-twitter-followers/	3,834 (1.97%)	3,266 (1.90%)	00:03:06	3,167 (2.10%)	93.87%	83.44%	<\$0.01
10. /blog/ideal-blog-post-length/	3,660 (1.88%)	3,384 (1.97%)	00:04:12	3,076 (2.04%)	87.06%	83.22%	<\$0.01
11. /blog/google-analytics-reporting-analysis/	3,205 (1.64%)	2,772 (1.61%)	00:03:17	2,555 (1.70%)	86.26%	79.19%	<\$0.01



Second report to generate: Reverse Goal Path Report (Conversion >> Goals >> Reverse Goal Path)

Select the goal you want to explore in the All Goals drop-down menu at the top of the page (for example, “newsletter subscribers”). This will show you all the goals completed for newsletter subscribers, as well as what people were doing right before they subscribed.

The page a visitor was on just before subscribing to the newsletter is known as Previous Step 1 (the page before that is Previous Step 2, and so on). By creating an advanced filter that just shows the conversions where Previous Step 1 was a blog post, the report will show you raw numbers on which posts inspired the greatest number of people to convert.



To get a more complete picture, however, you will also need to see total page views for each of those high-converting posts (since these posts did not necessarily attract traffic at the same rates). For this, you will need to go back to the data you collected from the All Pages report to determine the conversion rate. Take the page views for each of the high-converting posts and divide this number by the number of subscribers the post generated. This will give you the conversion rate for that post.

Bonus tip: The same report and process can be used to determine which of your website pages support your lead gen funnel most successfully. Just change your goal to Lead Generation, and use advanced filtering to remove blog posts and other content that are not used for lead-gen purposes.

Suggested actions:

- Drive traffic to the high-converting posts through social media, email, internal linking, paid promotions, etc.
- Publish more content on those topics.

Conversion Rate Per Blog Post

	Blog Post URL	Pageviews	Subscribers	Conversion Rate
2	/how-to-market-an-event/	75303	168	0.22%
3	/inaccurate-google-analytics-traffic-sources/	37436	25	0.07%
				0.06%
				0.35%
				0.10%
				0.00%
				0.12%
9	/website-navigation/	14420	17	0.12%
10	/seo-best-practices/	12325	11	0.09%
11	/social-media-for-nonprofits/	11669	9	0.08%

Even in the top 10 visited posts some are MUCH more inspiring

REPORT TYPE	QUESTION YOU WANT TO ANSWER	REPORT/PATH TO VIEW	ANALYSIS SUGGESTIONS
AUDIENCE REPORTS Use these reports to understand who your audience members are, what their content interests are, and how they are interacting with the content you publish.	<i>Are visitors using mobile devices to access our site?</i>	Mobile Overview (Audience >> Mobile >> Overview)	Click on the Percentage View button to get a visualization of how the data in your query compares to other options in its category.
	<i>Are mobile visitors less engaged than visitors on other platforms?</i>	Mobile Overview — Comparison View (Audience >> Mobile >> Overview — click “comparison view” in the options bar)	Select your preferred engagement indicator, such as bounce rate, pages per session, or average session duration, and look for anomalies in the data. For example, if your bounce rates are significantly higher among your mobile users, it could indicate the need to optimize your mobile experience to increase engagement.
	<i>What is the most common path visitors take through our site?</i>	User Flow Report (Audience >> User Flow)	Click on one of the top pages of your site and you will get the option to Explore traffic through the page (which removes traffic data for all other pages), or Highlight traffic through the page (which displays the traffic for that page, while still showing other pages). From here, you should clearly see the top path visitors take, and can determine whether or not it aligns with the navigation path you intend for them to follow. Any “wrong turns” along the way could indicate a need to make it easier for visitors to navigate to the content they want most. Note: Find more details on how to analyze this report .
ACQUISITION REPORTS These reports provide insights on how your content is getting discovered, and where your traffic is coming from.	<i>Which of our social channels is driving the most traffic to our site content?</i>	Channel Report (Acquisition >> All Traffic >> Channels)	Click on “social” in the list of channel groupings to see a breakdown of your site traffic by platform. You can also click on Percentage View to view the data in pie chart format, for easier comparison.
	<i>Which social network drives the best traffic to our site?</i>	Channel Report (filtered) (Acquisition >> All Traffic >> Channels — filtered by goal)	“Best” channels are those that convert visitors at a higher rate. So you will need to view the data relative to the specific conversion goals you want to measure performance against.
	<i>Which keyword phrases are we ranking for?</i>	Queries Report (Acquisition >> Search Console>> Queries)	This report provides a quick view of your ranking for the top keywords in your industry, which can help you identify how successful your content is at being discovered by your target audience. Note: You will first need to connect your Google Analytics account to Google Search Console. Follow these step-by-step instructions .
BEHAVIOR REPORTS These reports help you evaluate the actions of your site visitors, uncover ways to improve their user experience, and optimize the engagement potential of your content.	<i>What information are visitors looking to find when they arrive on our site?</i>	Site Search Report (Behavior >> Site Search >> Search Terms)	Add Exit Page as a secondary dimension to see which page those visitors were on when they left your site. If a visitor leaves from the same page on which they first arrived, it may indicate that they aren’t finding the information they wanted or expected.
	<i>Which of our blog posts are the most engaging to visitors?</i>	All Pages Report (Behavior >> Site Content >> All Pages)	Use the search filter on the All Pages report to view only the data that’s related to your blog posts. Then, click on Comparison View to see relative engagement data for your posts.
CONVERSION REPORTS Use these reports to determine whether or not your content is helping your business achieve its marketing goals, and discover which content efforts are achieving the best results.	<i>Which posts support conversion at the highest rate?</i>	All Pages Report (filtered) (Behavior >> Site Content >> All Pages —filtered for blog posts)	While the Page Value column on this report will show you at which rate each post contributes to the conversion goals you’ve set for your GA account, it’s difficult to support a decision with the small, fractional values it displays. The best way to evaluate conversions is to combine this information with data from the Reverse Goal Path Report (described below). This will show you the posts that are supporting the most conversions, and at what rate.
	<i>Which posts support conversion at the highest rate?</i>	Reverse Goal Path Report (Conversion >> Goals >> Reverse Goal Path)	Select the goal you want to explore in the All Goals drop-down menu at the top of the page (for example “newsletter subscribers”). This will show you all the goals completed for newsletter subscribers, as well as what people were doing right before they subscribed. Then, divide the number of subscribers any of your highest-performing posts generated by its total page views count. This will give you the conversion rate for that post.



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About Andy Crestodina



Andy Crestodina is co-founder and strategic director at Orbit Media, a web design company in Chicago. Andy is also an instructor for the Content Marketing Institute Online Training and Certification program, and is consistently among the most popular speakers at Content Marketing World.

About Content Marketing Institute



[Content Marketing Institute](#) is the leading global content marketing education and training organization, teaching enterprise brands how to attract and retain customers through compelling, multichannel storytelling. CMI's [Content Marketing World](#) event, the largest content marketing-focused event, is held every September in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and the [Intelligent Content Conference](#) event is held every spring. CMI publishes the bi-monthly magazine [Chief Content Officer](#) and provides strategic consulting and content marketing research for some of the best-known brands in the world. Watch this [video](#) to learn more about CMI, a UBM company.