An SEO’s guide to Google Analytics terms

We all know Google Analytics is a powerful tool for serving up actionable data. And one of the quickest ways to get that data is to be clear about what all those terms mean.

What does **bounce rate** mean and is it connected in anyway to **exit rate**? And how about **sessions** and **page views**?

If those questions sounds familiar but you’re not sure of the answers, read on…

Because as soon as you understand all the Google Analytics terms, you can begin to get closer to the actionable data you need, the kind of data you can use to increase visitors, sales, and sign-ups.

Google Analytics can show what pages you need to improve in order to rank higher in organic search. It shows you if your copy needs tweaking, keywords need updating, or meta-descriptions re-writing. It also tells you if your call to action button is converting or not.

See also: A guide to setting up Google Analytics for your WordPress site.

Bounce rate

What Google Says:

> *“A bounce is a single-page session on your site. In Analytics, a bounce is calculated specifically as a session that triggers only a single request to the Analytics server, such as when a user opens a single page on your site and then exits without triggering any other requests to the Analytics server during that session.”*

A user could leave a site because they lost interest, were confused, didn’t find the answer to their query, or did already found the information they were looking for.

The right kind of thinking here is this: What was the person expecting to find after searching for a keyword or key phrase. And does my site provide it?

If the bounce rate is very high, this is an indicator the site has a significant problem. Here are some helpful tips on ways to reduce bounce rate.

Alternatively, if the content is awesome and people spend a long time interacting with it, then that is known as **“sticky” content**.

If you’re just starting out with GA, here’s something to help get you started:

[embedded content]

Clicks

The number of times people click on your link from the search results page is the number of clicks that appears on Google’s SEO report.

Clickthrough-Rate (CTR) is the number of clicks to your site divided by the number of impressions. Impressions are the amount of times your search link is shown to a searcher. So if CTR is high, the meta description is doing its job and converting searchers to visitors. However, if CTR rate is low

then it’s worth testing different headlines.

Note that these clicks are **not** related to Google Ads clicks. These appear in Google Ads reports.

Entrances

If your site has more than one page then it has different entrance points, and Google records those separate entries.

Perhaps a blog post is performing well and bringing in traffic. Great. It might also show pages you want to be traffic-heavy are not performing properly.

Events

Events are certain user actions that happen on the site, and are created in line with KPIs.

For example, a site might offer a free download after pressing a button. So an event gets recorded each time the button is pressed. Now we have an event, we can extract actionable data. We know how many visitors the page had, and we know how many of those people we converted into button pressers.

Exit page

If an entrance page is where people arrive at your site, an exit page is where they leave.

A visitor may click through from the SERP, read the article, click on an internal link to read another article, then leave. Are there weaknesses on the exit page? This is easy to spot if one page stands out with a high leave rate.

Exit rate (% Exit)

The exit rate is calculated by dividing the number of ‘exits’ made from the page by the number of page views. However, a

page with a high % exit rate may not necessarily have a high bounce rate.

But – and we said front and center these terms are confusing – a page with low exit rate is more likely to have a low bounce rate. That's because users are probably heading to other pages on the site rather than exiting.

Hits

A hit is a request made to a web server to show a certain file. This could be a web page, an image or other things.

An event is considered a hit. A page view is a hit. All of these hits are grouped together in what Google calls a session. A session is a group of hits from one user. Google uses hits to determine the interaction between the user and the web page.

If the user takes no action for 30 minutes then Google ends the session.

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Impressions

We first spoke of impression when looking at clicks. Impressions occur when your link is served up in the search results.

According to Google's SEO Reports, impressions do not include impressions by paid Google Ads campaigns, which are recorded separately.

In short, when the user can see your link in the search

results, that’s counted as an impression. And as you know, we use impressions and clicks to calculate the CTR.

Landing or entrance page

Both of these terms are used by Google to indicate the very first page a user lands on at the beginning of each session. This means in GA you can check which pages users most arrive at your site.

Page views

Page views are the number of times a visitor lands on any page of your website – these are called screen views on mobile.

Within page views, we first have **unique page views**. Google does not count multiple views of the same page by the same person in the same session as individual views. Instead, it counts them all as one unique view.

Then we have **pages per session**, also called ‘**Average Page Depth**’.

APD is the average number of pages viewed by a each user in one session and inside the analytics it includes repeated views of a single page.

Sessions

We encountered sessions earlier on. You already know that a session is the complete amount of time a visitor spends on your website.

You also know that each action a visitor takes is recorded as a hit. And all those hits are recorded within the session. This means in a 24 hour period you might have 100 sessions and 300 hits. The hits figure is equal to or higher than the sessions number.

There is a time limit on sessions. With standard GA settings, a session is ended after 30 minutes of inactivity.

Average session duration is the average time of a user's session and the calculation to get this is to divide the session duration by the number of sessions.

Time on page

Time on page is the average amount of time that particular visitor spent on the page. If a page is text-heavy then there's much more chance of each session producing a greater amount of time on page.

Google records average time on page. This is a simple calculation of dividing time on page by the number of page views, minus the exit number.

Users, visitors, or traffic – which one do you need to know?

Each of these terms describes visitors who access your site. Google uses these terms as and when they want.

There is, of course, a self-evident distinction between a new visitor and a returning visitor. Traffic generally expresses the total volume of people visiting the website. But traffic is split down into categories…

Direct traffic is when someone sends you the full URL to a website and you click on that link to go directly to the site. No search has has taken place. Direct traffic is common when sending out a link to your email list. Each person would directly access the site.

Next, we have **organic search traffic**. Organic traffic is free and targeted, and comes about from SEO efforts to rank the site as high as possible in those all-important Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs). If the site is showing little to no

organic search, then go back to the drawing board on the keywords in use.

Paid search traffic means the number of people who visited the site via Google Ads.

Lastly we have **referral traffic**. This means a search engine, another website or social media site has placed a link to your web page on their site and is referring traffic to you.

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Top ranking factors for mobile-first indexing in order

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