Bounce and exit rate analytics: measure, assess, and audit to increase conversions

30-second summary:

- Bounce rate is the percentage of single-page visits or visits in which the person left your site from the entrance (landing) page
- This metric helps measure visit quality and relevance
- Exit rate is a metric that identifies the number of exits from your site, and, as with entrances, it will always be equal to the number of visits when applied over your entire website
- Use this metric in combination with particular content pages in order to determine the number of times that particular page was the last one viewed by visitors
- Pages that fail to meet visitor expectations, don’t provide clear navigation, talk about features rather than benefits, and content that’s not actionable all increase bounce rate

Google Analytics provides valuable intelligence into how visitors find, interact with and leave your website. This

intelligence is central to improving both user experience and the profitability of your website. Google Analytics provides many useful metrics that help you do this and two of the most useful are the bounce rate and exit rate.

The difference between a bounce and an exit can be confusing, especially if you are new to analytics. The goal of this article, then, is to demystify the two and explain why they are important. It also acts as a guide to interpreting bounce and exit data and how to lower them in order to improve the performance of your website and increase conversions.

Making an entrance that counts

Before you can understand and calculate bounce rate you need to know a little about entrance pages, also referred to as landing pages and entry pages. Google defines an entrance page as:

Entrances

This metric identifies the number of entrances to your site. It will always be equal to the number of visits when applied over your entire website. Thus, this metric is most useful when combined with particular content pages, at which point, it will indicate the number of times a particular page served as an entrance to your site.

In short, an entrance page is the first page a visitor lands on when visiting a website. Entrances are, as we will see, a key factor in calculating bounce rate.

How to view your entrances?

In Google Analytics, you can easily view your entrances by following these simple steps:

1. **Go to “Behavior,” under “Reports”**

2. **Click on “Site Content”**

3. **Click on “All Pages”**

4. **View your “Entrances”**

Entrances are particularly helpful since they can show you which pages are bringing the most visits to your site. They can also tell you the opposite and help you identify the weakest pages with lower bounce rates.

Well, what is a bounce?

A bounce is a single-page visit. A bounce occurs when a visitor enters and exits a website viewing no other pages other than the entrance page.

And, what is bounce rate?

If, for example, 100 visitors enter your site via Page “A” and 20 of them leave without clicking through to any other page, page “A” would have a bounce rate of 20 percent.

The above figure shows site-wide averages.

Some of the reports Google Analytics generates will give site-wide averages. The screen grab above has been taken from the ‘Top Content’ report which can be found by clicking the Content tab in your Google Analytics dashboard.

The first thing you might notice is that when you add the average bounce rate and the average exit rate together the result is greater than 100 percent. If bounce rate and exit rate are measures of how many people leave your site, how can the total be greater than 100 percent. The answer is that it can’t.

You might be fooled into thinking that bounce rate is calculated as a percentage of Pageviews. This is a logical thought since it is figured in the report. However, when added together, bounces and exits would again be greater than the total Pageviews.

Bounce rate is not based on the number of visitors or the number of page views it’s based on entrances.

Why do people bounce?

People bounce because of many reasons the key to reducing your bounce rates lies in identifying and addressing the most common ones:

1. When pages don’t meet expectations

Let’s say, for example, that you are looking for a new air fryer. So you Google “buy air fryers free shipping”. You see an ad that says “air fryers With Free Shipping”. So you click on it. But when you click on the ad, instead of a landing page

about different air fryers, you’re on the site’s homepage. What are you going to do? Bounce back to Google and make a new research to find a page that is 100% about air fryers.

2. When design is ugly

Having an ugly design can also lead users to bounce back. People largely judge websites first, based on design, and second on the content.

3. When the page gives users what they’re looking for

Yes. Not all bounces are “bad”. A bounce can be, in fact, a sign that your page gave users exactly what they were looking for.

For example, I have been looking personally over the last few days for a low-carb chicken soup recipe and I landed on this recipe page. This landing page had everything I needed to make the recipe: ingredients, detailed instructions, and pictures. So, as soon as I got my soup to simmer over medium-low heat, I closed the page.

Despite the fact that this single-page session is “technically” a bounce, it is not because that website suffered a bad UX or an ugly design. It’s just because I got what I needed.

Identifying pages with high bounce rates

Notice the figure below that shows sitewide entrances and bounces.

To get at the real numbers that contribute to bounce rate you need to dig a little deeper. The screen grab above has been taken from the ‘Top Landing Pages’ report which can also be found by clicking the Content tab in your Google Analytics dashboard.

As you work your way down the report you can also view bounce rates for individual pages.

The above figure shows the bounce rate at a page level.

The ‘Top Landing Pages’ report helps identify pages with high bounce rates that might require further investigation.

You can clearly see from Figure three how the bounce rate is calculated for a single page: (283 bounces / 303 entrances) * 100 = 93.39939939934% which analytics has rounded up to 93.40%. As interesting as this is, it tells us nothing about what is driving the bounce rate and what steps to take if any are required to lower it.

Bounce rate through poor user experience

Pages that fail to meet visitor expectations, don’t provide clear navigation, talk about features rather than benefits, and show content that is not actionable – all increase bounce rate. Not all visitors on your site are using desktop machines with ultra-fast connections and will abandon your site if a page takes too long to download. If you have been over-zealously linking to your site, links from pages that are not closely related can also increase the bounce rate. These are all things you can test for and fix to a degree.

Missing timestamps and the pages time forgot

Google Analytics reports the time visitors spend on pages by comparing timestamps. When a visitor lands on a page a timestamp is created which records the precise time they arrived.
If a visitor arrives at page “A” at 13.45 and clicks through and lands on page “B” at 13.47 two timestamps will be created. By subtracting the time the visitor lands on page “A” from the time they land on page “B” you arrive at the time spent on page “A”:

13.47 – 13.45 = 2 minutes spent on page “A”.

If at 13.50 the visitor leaves your site completely no timestamp is created and there is no way to tell how long the visitor spent on page “B”.

Why was no timestamp created? If the page was outside the scope of your analytics account, on another domain for example, the timestamp can’t be accessed by your analytics account. Therefore, the time spent on that page can’t be determined for that page view.

Similarly, the time spent on a page by visitor who enters a site and bounces without visiting any other page cannot be measured either.

Cookies, sessions, and timeouts

Google Analytics uses cookies to track the activity of visitors to your pages and report those activities back to their server. Cookies enable Google to distinguish the activities of each visitor individually and track sequential page visits made by the same user during their time (session) on your website. This information is then reported back to you

when you log into your Google Analytics account.

Every bounce or exit is the result of a session timeout. In Google Analytics, a session will timeout after 30 minutes of browser inactivity. If a visitor navigates to another website, the session will still continue for a maximum of 30 minutes before registering a bounce or exit. As long as the visitor returns before the session times out and clicks through to another page of your website, it will not be considered as either a bounce or an exit.

- Each and every visit to your site culminates in a session timeout
- A session that times out after a single page view is classed as a bounce
- A session that times out after multiple page views are classed as an exit

Have a look at the tabs open in your browser right now – how many have been open for more than 29 minutes without any activity? Despite the page still staying open in your browser, some of the sessions associated with individual pages might have already timed out causing an exit or a bounce. Also closing your browser, disconnecting from the internet, or hitting the back button will all cause a session to time out which will *likely* be recorded as a bounce or an exit in someone's Analytics.

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