

Goal Setting

Using Conversions and Goal Reports

Abstract

A Goal report offers libraries the ability to track goals (also called conversions), however there is often disconnect between what libraries consider a goal and how Google Analytics defines it. Learn about Google Analytics's goal setting ability and the types of goals it offers. Chapter 6 of Library Technology Reports (vol. 49, no. 4) "Maximizing Google Analytics: Six High-Impact Practices" concludes with advice for libraries to connect their strategic goals directly to a Goal report.

Using Goal reports is another high-impact practice you should implement in Google Analytics. It allows you to leverage your data to measure the success of your website. However, it is up to the library to define success and identify the conversion, which is data that measures the success. Similar to Event reports, Goal reports are empty until a goal is created and configured within a profile. Unlike event tracking, goals are created in the Google Analytics profile and require no direct customization to your site's code. This chapter outlines Google Analytics goal-tracking features, the process of creating goals, and ways to understand the goal data.

Connecting Website Goals to Goal Reports

Before we can jump into Goal reports, it is essential that libraries take the time to determine their website goals, or desired actions on their website. What do you want your website users to accomplish on the site? To answer this question, libraries must understand the purpose their website serves. We recommend libraries

go through the process of identifying their site's users and content along with the organizational goals that relate to their website if they need help identifying their website's purpose. Appendix 6.1 includes an example activity worksheet to help guide libraries in this process.

Once a library identifies the desired actions on their websites, they need to convert that information into measurable goals that could be tracked in a Goal report. This chapter is designed to introduce you to the abilities of Google Analytics's Goal reports and provide some practical advice in configuring your Goal reports. For readers interested in the process of creating measurable website goals, we suggest a more comprehensive overview available in *Web Analytics Strategies for Information Professionals: A LITA Guide*.¹

Google Analytics's Goal Types

While website goals are whatever a library requires, Google Analytics offers only four goal types: URL Destination, Event, Visit Duration, and Page/Visit. Each goal type has its own type of conversion—the desired action used to measure the goal. By understanding your goal type options, libraries can select which is the best conversion to measure their website goals.

URL Destination Goal

The URL Destination goal tracks when a visitor views a targeted web page, called the Goal Page. This goal type identifies the Goal Page, so each time that specific page is viewed, it counts as a conversion—a sign the goal was completed. For example, if a library has a goal involving users renewing their books online, then that

library could set a “confirmation of renewing a book” web page as its Goal Page. Each time a website user gets to the screen that confirms a book has been successfully renewed, a conversion takes place. Additionally, the URL Destination goal is the only goal type that uses the Funnel feature (which will be discussed later).

Event Goal

An Event goal is similar to the URL Destination goal, but rather than being limited to web pages, the Event goal is triggered whenever a visitor performs a specific event. This goal type is useful only if event tracking is correctly implemented on the website, because if there is no event data, there can be no event-related goal data. The Event goal type is ideal for libraries that have goals involving any of those outbound links that are being tracked as events. This goal’s conversion is directly related to an event.

Visit Duration Goal

The Visit Duration goal tracks the length of time a user is on a website or specific web page: whenever that visitor stays a defined length of time, the conversion is triggered. Let’s say a library created a tutorial that should take the average user three minutes to complete. That library could create a Visit Duration goal that counts every visit that lasts longer than three minutes as a desired goal. The conversion involves the time-on-site metric.

Page/Visit Goal

The final goal type, Page/Visit, monitors when a visitor views a targeted number of web pages before exiting the site. If a library has a goal that a visitor should view at least two web pages before exiting the site, then the library could create a Page/Visit goal that is triggered whenever a visit lasts for at least two pages. This goal’s conversion is based on the pages-per-visit metric.

Configuring Goals in Google Analytics

Ready to start adding goals to your Google Analytics profile? There are a few caveats you should know before you start the goal-creation process:

- You must be an administrator on the profile to make goals! There are two permission types: administrator and user. Both can view the Goal reports, but only administrators can create the goals. If you are not the administrator on your Google Analytics profile, ask to become one, or work with your library’s Google Analytics

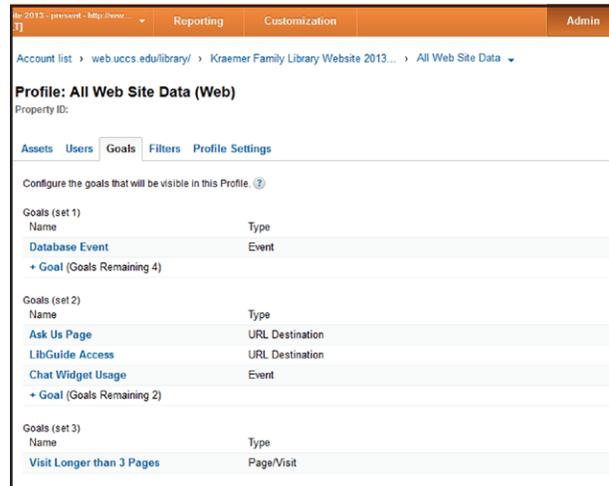


Figure 6.1
Goals tab, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

administrator to implement the desired goals.

- Goal reporting is not done in real time. After you create a goal, it can take up to 24 hours for any data to be displayed in your Goal report.
- There are a finite number of goals you can have per profile. Google Analytics organizes the goals into four goal sets, and each goal set can have up to five goals. This means you can have a total of twenty goals per profile. Need more goals than that? Google Analytics recommends setting up another profile for that website, which provides you with another twenty goals.²
- Once a goal is created, it cannot be deleted. Goals can be edited to track a different goal, but it is not recommended, because the old goal data already collected will always be associated with that specific goal. This is important to understand since you have only so many goals per profile. Be sure to go through the planning process to identify your website goals before adding them to the profile.

Once you are ready to create your goals in Google Analytics, go into the profile for the website you want to track the goal data. Go to the Admin section, and choose the Goals tab. In this area, you will see any previously created goals, as shown in figure 6.1; you can edit them or create new goals.

Creating a Visit Duration or Page/Visit Goal

The simplest goals to create are the Visit Duration and Page/Visit goal types. Start by providing a goal name, mark the goal as active (if you are ready for it to start tracking data), and select either Visit Duration or Page/Visit as the goal type. In the Goal Details section, identify the desired visit duration or the number

of pages desired to be visited in one visit. To monetize the goal, add the optional goal value. Click the Save button, and the goal is saved.

These goals are easy to set up, but they do not provide a lot of actionable data by themselves. It is highly recommended to keep them to a minimum unless your library has a specific plan for using the data.

Creating an Event Goal

Setting up an Event goal is similar to the Visit Duration and Page/Visit goal types until the Goal Details section, which requires you to select the category, action, label, or value of the event you wish to track as a goal. Technically, you must select at least one of these variables, but if you track many different types of events, you will generally want to select more variables to ensure you are collecting goal data for the correct event. Additionally, the Goal report can use the assigned event value or assign a different default value if your library is interested in calculating the monetary value of the event being tracked.

Creating a URL Destination Goal

The URL Destination goal is the most complicated goal type to create depending on goal pages being tracked. Similar to the other goals, first select a unique goal name, mark it as active, and select URL Destination for the goal type. Under the Goal Details section, you must select the specific URL to be tracked as a goal. Note that you do not use the full URL for the web page, but rather the abbreviated page URL that Google Analytics tracks. For example, to track the web page `www.uccs.edu/library/help/offcampus.html`, you would enter `/library/help/offcampus.html`. Sound complicated? Check out your Google Analytics All Pages report (under the Content section) to see the abbreviated page URLs being used. The Goal URL box should prompt you with suggestions as you type in the URL to let you know you are on the correct track.

Next, select the match type that determines if you are tracking a single page or a group of pages in one Goal report. The Exact Match option implies Google Analytics will only track one web page as a goal page and that goal page is exactly what you typed in as your goal URL—such as the `/library/help/offcampus.html` example. Selecting the Head Match or Regular Expression Match means you are tracking a series of web pages as your goal URL.

The Head Match option means the goal page can be any URL that matches the beginning of the string defined in the goal page's URL. For example, suppose a library wants to track all of its help guide-related web pages as a goal page. If all of those guide web pages are in the same subdirectory, such as `www.library.org/`

guides, the library could set the goal URL to `/guides` and select Head Match as the match type. Then any help guide whose URL begins with `www.library.org/guides` (such as `www.library.org/guides/findingbooks.html` and `www.library.org/guides/remotearchive.html`) would be tracked as a goal page.

The Regular Expression Match is the most flexible option, which allows you to use regular expression (regex) in your goal URL string to precisely identify the set of the pages to track as a goal. This match type is ideal when the goal pages you want to track reside in different subdirectories. Refer to Google Analytics regex guide, "About Regular Expressions," for ideas on how to use regex to correctly craft your goal URL.

Google Analytics: About Regular Expressions
<http://support.google.com/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1034324>

After selecting the match type, you can choose if the goal pages are case-sensitive—leave blank if your URL string is not case-sensitive. Assign a goal value to the goal if desired.

Lastly, you have an option to set up a funnel. This choice is available only for URL Destination goals and is completely optional. A funnel outlines the expected path to a goal page. It is designed to show you where website users are leaving the assigned funnel/pathway and not completing the desired goal. If you choose to create a funnel, check the Use Funnel box and identify the specific web pages you anticipate website users must navigate through in order to reach the specific goal page. Add as many funnel steps as web page users have to travel through to the goal page. After all that customization, do not forget to save the goal.

Understanding Goal Reports and Data

After setting up your website goals and waiting for Google Analytics to start collecting the data, you are finally ready to head over to the Goal reports to reap the benefits. To find the related Goal reports, expand the Conversion section under Standard Reports. Recall that a conversion is just a desired action on a website and is used to measure a goal: this is essential because conversions are the primary metric you will find in most Goal reports.

This section covers the related Goal reports including Goal Overview report, Goal URLs report, Funnel Visualization report, Reverse Goal Path report, and Goal Flow report. The first three reports default to combining the data from all the goals, and the last two show only one goal at a time. Each report can display the data collected from an individual goal. Simply

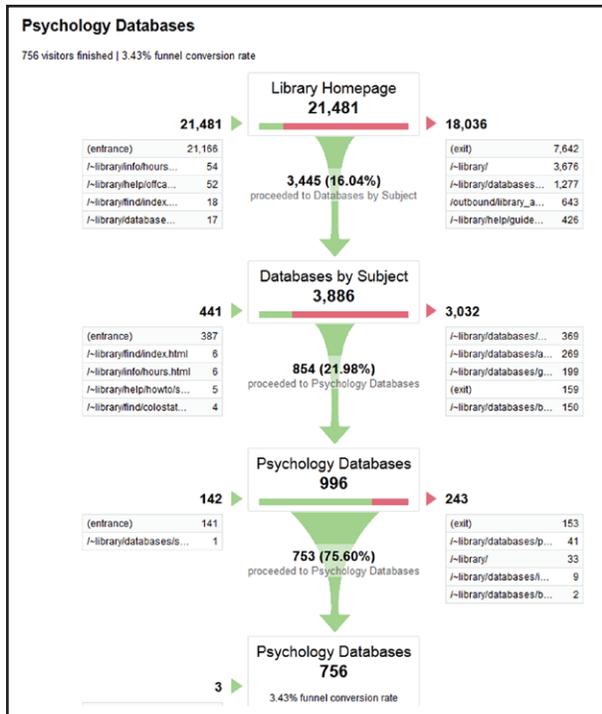


Figure 6.2
Funnel report, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

select the goal you wish to analyze and change your Goal Option (located near the top of the Goal report) to reflect the goal you want.

Goal Overview Report

The Goal Overview report is a standard report that tells you how often a goal is completed. It provides the total completions of the goal (number of conversions), accrued goal value (if value was assigned), conversion rate (this is number of conversions divided by total number of visits to the entire website: it puts in perspective how often a visit results in triggering the goal), and the abandonment rate if a funnel was enabled for the goal. The report also includes a direct link to the traffic sources that contributed to the goal and the goal completion locations pulled from the Goal URLs report.

Goal URLs Report

The Goal URLs report shows the web pages where goals were completed. For a URL Destination goal, the goal completion location will most likely be the actual goal page. Other goals, such as Visit Duration or Page/Visit goal types could be whatever web page the visitor was on when the conversion was triggered for those goals. This report is particularly useful for the event goals because it shows which pages more

often caused the event if the event is located on more than one page.

Funnel Visualization Report

Since this report is available only for URL Destination goals, it is not useful for any other type of Goal report. Yet it is still worthwhile to have if your URL Destination goal page has a desired path you want your users to navigate to reach the goal page—just remember to set up the funnel when you configure the goal.

If a funnel is properly implemented, this report shows you where website users enter your site and the pages they access to reach the goal page. Funnels are useful because they show where users abandon the process before reaching the goal page. This can help pinpoint potential problems with the site leading users to that goal page. Figure 6.2 shows a funnel for the goal to get website users to the psychology databases. The funnel was set to start tracking from the library's home page. Over 21,000 visits took place on the home page, but only 3,445 visits continued to the Databases by Subject web page, which is the next page required in the steps to access the psychology databases. From there, fewer users selected to go to the Psychology Databases web page and even fewer actually ended their visit to the library's website by clicking on a psychology database link. This really is not too surprising since the library has numerous databases available in other subject areas and not every single visitor to the library's website wants to use a psychology database. However, it does show some interesting findings, including that roughly 25 percent of the visitors who are on the Psychology Databases web page do not click on a psychology database and end up going to a different section of the website or just leave the site!

Not every URL Destination goal makes an ideal candidate to be tracked in a funnel. If you cannot identify a clear path to the goal page, feel free to skip the funnel setup because the next Goal report also helps you understand how users can reach a goal page.

Reverse Goal Path Report

The Reverse Goal Path report shows the last three steps, or web pages, a visitor navigated in order to complete the goal. This report is available for any goal type and is ideal for understanding the most popular routes users take to trigger that conversion. The information is invaluable even for goals with funnels because it shows other potential routes to the goal page. Figure 6.3 presents a reverse goal path for an event goal. The Goal Completion Location is the web page where the event was triggered, and Goal Previous Step - 1 is the web page the visitor was on before reaching the web page with the event. Step - 2 and Step - 3 are the previous web pages the visitor was on before reaching

Goal Option:
Goal 9: Medheal Database Event

Explorer

advanced

	Goal Completion Location	Goal Previous Step - 1	Goal Previous Step - 2	Goal Previous Step - 3	Medheal Database Event (Goal 9 Completions)
1.	/~library/databases/medheal.html	/~library/	(entrance)	(not set)	972
2.	/~library/databases/medheal.html	/~library/databases/index.html	/~library/	(entrance)	218
3.	/~library/databases/medheal.html	(entrance)	(not set)	(not set)	85

Figure 6.3
Reverse Goal Path, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

Step - 1. Basically, the visitor navigated from Step - 3, to Step - 2, to Step - 1, to finally trigger the event on the Goal Completion Location. Note that (entrance) refers to the visitor entering the website at that point and (not set) implies that the visitor was not currently on the website. In the example in figure 6.3, the most common route to triggering the event was to land on the library's home page, navigate directly to the Medicine/Health Sciences Database page, and click on the outbound database link (the actual event). This is a great sign that those users know how to quickly navigate to that resource.

Goal Flow Report

The final Goal report is the Goal Flow report, which uses a flowchart to visualize how the majority of users navigate through your goal steps. This report is available for all of the goal types, but it is currently useful only for URL Destination goals and does not report useful information for the other goal types. The main advantage of this report is that it encourages you to segment your data to look at specific subsets of visitors.

Why Is My Goal Data Not Showing Up in the Goal Reports?

There are several potential reasons for data not showing up in the Goal reports:

1. You need to wait a full 24 hours after creating the goal for Google Analytics to report the data.
2. The goal page or event you are trying to track is not being tracked in Google Analytics.
3. There is a misconfiguration in your goal settings.

The first issue will solve itself in time. The second issue is easy to check by ensuring the Google Analytics tracking code is properly embedded on the targeted goal web page or by checking the Events report to ensure you correctly identified the event's category, action, label, or value. The last issue can be trickier to troubleshoot and is most likely to occur with the URL Destination goal type. Double-check that your goal URL and match type are correct. If you are using regex, you can test it in other standard reports by crafting a custom segment or using the advanced search.

Conclusion

As with event tracking, configuring your Goal reports takes time. However, goals help libraries use their website use data to measure the success of a website by combining Goal reports and website goal planning. While Goal reports are useful, the goal data collected can be used in other Google Analytics reports via custom segments and custom reports. This allows you to further analyze your goal data to find additional insights, such as which visitor group is most likely to complete a goal or how long it takes for a goal to be completed—great data to have and share.

Notes

1. Tabatha Farney and Nina McHale, *Web Analytics Strategies for Information Professionals: A LITA Guide* (Chicago: ALA TechSource, 2013).

2. “About Goals,” Google Analytics website, accessed March 5, 2013, <http://support.google.com/analytics/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=1012040&topic=1007030&ctx=topic>.

Appendix 6.1: Website Inventory Activity

A blank copy of this handout is available at www.uccs.edu/~tfarney/presentations/web_inventory_activity.pdf

Website Name: Kraemer Family Library’s main website

Website URL: www.uccs.edu/library

Date of Inventory: August 2012

Related Websites

Directions: List the other sites this website either links to or refers users to.

Site Name	URL (optional)	Basic Purpose	Level of Importance
Library Catalog	library.uccs.edu	Search for books, films, and other items in the library.	Very High—Must have it.
Databases	Over 180 urls	Research resources for students, staff, and faculty.	Very High—Must have it.
Journal Search/ Citation Linker	http://du5zf7mh8h.search.serialssolutions.com	Provided by Serials Solutions—connects users to e-journal holdings from websites and databases.	Very High—Must have it.
Prospector	www.coalliance.org/prospector	Shared consortium library catalog.	Very High—Must have it.
ILLiad	http://uccs.illiad.oclc.org/illiad/logon.html	Interlibrary loan.	Very High—Must have it.
LibGuides	libguides.uccs.edu	Online class and subject guides.	Very High—Must have it.
Facebook	www.facebook.com/uccslibrary	Images from displays.	Useful.
Flickr	www.flickr.com/photos/27640054@N08	Images from displays and events—marketing and content.	Useful.
University’s site	www.uccs.edu	Parent institution.	Branding necessity.
SciFinder Scholar Restricted Page	N/A	Because our access to this database requires it.	Very High—Must have it.

Site Users

Directions: List the potential user groups for the website. Put an * by the user groups you consider to be your main user groups (can have more than one).

<p>*students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on campus students - distance education students - listening-in students - students with disabilities <p>*faculty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -alumni -university staff -library staff -public patrons -users from other universities -local researchers

Related Goals

Directions: Include other organizational goals or planning information that could be relevant to this website.

Goal/Planning Text	Documentation Level (select one)
"The Library enhances our users' ability to access information and develop critical research skills by creating...virtual pathways for them to interact with Library resources and staff at the most opportune times in their learning processes."—Library Mission Statement, 2012.	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent Organization (campus/main library) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Library/Department Library/ Branch <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Department (web services, reference) <input type="checkbox"/> Website Specific <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
"UCCS, a premier comprehensive undergraduate and specialized graduate research university, provides students with academically rigorous and life-enriching experiences in a vibrant university community. We advance knowledge, integrate student learning with the spirit of discovery, and broaden access to higher education for the benefit of southern Colorado, the state, nation and world."—UCCS vision statement, 2012.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parent Organization (campus/main library) <input type="checkbox"/> Library/Department Library/ Branch <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Department (web services, reference) <input type="checkbox"/> Website Specific <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Values of Excellent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student focus • Innovation • Inclusive Diversity (selections from UCCS' Values of Excellence, 2012.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parent Organization (campus/main library) <input type="checkbox"/> Library/Department Library/ Branch <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Department (web services, reference) <input type="checkbox"/> Website Specific <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

Defining Purpose

Directions: Write the primary purpose and at least one secondary purpose of the website.

Primary Purpose: The Library's main website assists site users to find information resources quickly and efficiently. Secondary Purpose: Provide several options for library users to connect to research assistance. Secondary Purpose: Allow users to discover information about related library events and news. Secondary Purpose: Assist library users to find and utilize physical library services.

Developing Objectives and Measurable Goals Activity

Primary Purpose: The Library's main website assists site users to find information resources quickly and efficiently.

Objective 1: Connect a majority of users that accessed the library's databases in a quick and efficient manner.

Goal Statement	What are the conversion and/or reports needed for this goal?
65% or more of the users that accessed the library's databases did so in three clicks or less.	Conversion is the Event Goal Type with a custom segment (viewed three web pages or less before exiting site).
Over half of website visitors are able to find a library database in less than a minute from entering the site.	Conversion is the Event Goal Type with a custom segment (visit was 60 seconds or less before properly exiting to a database link).

Objective 2: Website users are able to connect to the library's catalog from the library's main website regardless of where they enter the website.

Goal Statement	What are the conversion and/or reports needed for this goal?
70% of visits exiting to the library catalog are able to access it within two clicks on the library's main site.	Event Goal Type (Use Google Analytics's Goal URL report)

Objective 3: Website users are able to efficiently connect to journal search.

Goal Statement	What are the conversion and/or reports needed for this goal?
65% of visits exiting to the library catalog are able to access it within two clicks on the library's main site.	Event Goal Type (Use Google Analytics's Reverse Goal Path report)