

# Measuring the Success of Your Social Media Presence with Google Analytics

Joel Tonyan

Whether you want to increase the number of your followers, drive social media users to your library's website, or improve event attendance through social media marketing, clear goals are essential to a successful social media strategy. How will you measure these goals? Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer built-in metrics for measuring the effectiveness of your social media presence. These platform-provided analytics collect invaluable demographic data about your followers and how they engage with your channels. If you are not already monitoring these built-in analytics, it is time to start.<sup>1</sup>

Although these platform-provided metrics are indispensable, they alone do not provide a comprehensive view of how users engage with your library's social media accounts. Facebook Insights, for instance, records how many times your followers click a link to an event registration web page on your library website, but it cannot tell you if they actually registered for the event. This is where Google Analytics comes in. With some simple customizations and basic technical knowledge, you can configure Google Analytics to provide a wealth of data about your social media channels, including how much traffic they drive to your website and what those social media users do on your website. This chapter highlights useful Google Analytics social media reports and discusses the importance of using campaign URLs to measure the success of your social media marketing.

*Joel Tonyan is the Systems and User Experience Librarian for the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. An avid social media user, he maintains his library's social media channels and chairs its marketing committee. His research interests include social media, marketing, and analytics.*

## Installing Google Analytics for Tracking Social Media

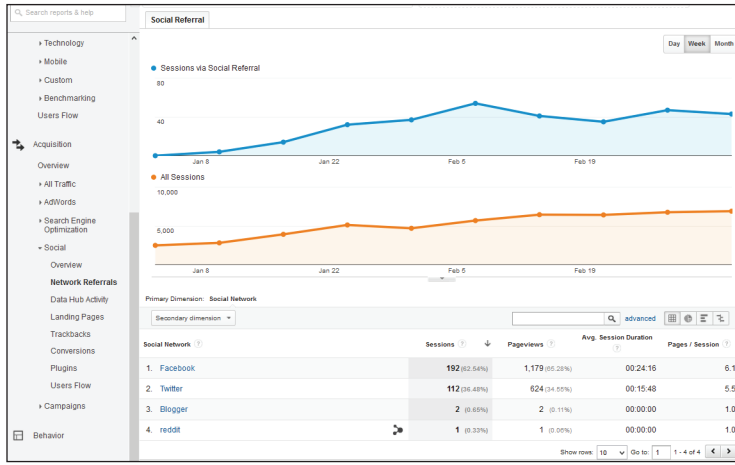
To get started, you will need a free Google Analytics account, and it is highly recommended you use Google Tag Manager (GTM) to manage how Google Analytics tracks social media traffic to your various library websites and online tools. The GTM container snippet is not installed on your social media websites. Instead, it should be added to each website you want to monitor for incoming social media traffic—for instance, your library website, online catalog, LibGuides, and so on. Refer to chapter 2 of this issue of *Library Technology Reports* for specifics on how to generate and install the GTM container snippet.

*Google Analytics*  
<https://analytics.google.com>

*Google Tag Manager*  
<http://tagmanager.google.com/?hl=en>

## Google Analytics Social Reports

Once you configure and add GTM (with a Google Analytics tag) to your website, Google Analytics provides a number of Social reports that focus on users



**Figure 7.1**  
Social Network Referrals report, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

coming to your website from a social media website. Simply navigate to the Acquisition report section in Google Analytics and select Social to view the available reports.

If your aim is to use social media simply to drive traffic to your website, then the Social Network Referrals report (figure 7.1) provides you with the data you need to measure this process. This report lists the social network website that referred users to your website along with the number of sessions and pageviews those users generated, their average session duration, and the average number of pages they viewed per session. Clicking the name of the social network in the report provides a list of the web page links that successfully sent users from a social media post to your website.

Most Social reports are ready to use out of the box, but some require additional customizations to improve their data reporting ability. The Social Users Flow report gives you a pageview-by-pageview account of where social media users go after they land on your website. By default, the Social Users Flow report groups users based on the social network they used to find your website, but it can also group users based on the social media post if you implement Campaign URLs.

## Improving Social Media Tracking with Campaign URLs and UTM Parameters

Google Analytics Social reports are not perfect for several reasons. First, Google Analytics accidentally registers some social media referral traffic as direct traffic, which does not appear in the Social reports. How could this happen? This is due to how Google Analytics

differentiates between direct traffic and referral traffic. In web analytics terms, direct traffic occurs when users navigate directly to your website by typing its URL into a web browser or opening a bookmark. Referral traffic occurs when a user enters your website by clicking on a link from another website like Facebook or Twitter. Ideally, all incoming traffic to your website generated by a link would be reported as referral, but if Google Analytics misses the referral website information as the user enters your website, it lumps that “unidentifiable” session into the direct traffic category. This is a common problem with links embedded in e-mails and online documents and routinely associated with shortened URLs, which are popular on Twitter because of its 140-character limit. Another famous offender is smartphone apps (including

Facebook and Twitter) that do not always pass on referral information when users click a link within the app.<sup>2</sup> All of these links have a high potential to be counted as direct traffic in Google Analytics, making you miss a lot of great social media–related data!

Not only is this frustrating, but Google Analytics Social reports also cannot distinguish between links you share on social media from links from other social media users’ posts. It does not allow you identify the referrals from your own social media posts!

Using Google Analytics’ Campaign URLs is the solution. A Campaign URL is a link that includes UTM (Urchin Tracking Module) parameters to tell Google Analytics to capture more metadata associated with that link. Using links enhanced with UTM parameters for your social media posts ensures any users that click on those links are recorded as social traffic instead of direct traffic—even if users click the link within a smartphone app or from a shortened URL. Additionally, these UTM parameters let you identify your social media posts, making them perfect for measuring specific marketing campaigns in Google Analytics Campaign reports.

### How Do UTM Parameters Work?

UTM parameters are placed at the end of any link and do not change the link itself—it still takes users where you want them to go. You simply add the UTM parameters immediately after a question mark in the desired link. Google Analytics recognizes five UTM parameters: `utm_source`, `utm_medium`, `utm_campaign`, `utm_term`, and `utm_content`. Three of these parameters (`utm_source`, `utm_medium`, and `utm_campaign`) are required parameters that must be present within the Campaign URL for Google Analytics to collect the best data.

The campaign source (`utm_source`) is where the traffic to your website originated. For instance, if you share a link to your website on Twitter, then the source would be `twitter`. The campaign medium (`utm_medium`) should list the medium, or the form of communication you used to share your message. For instance, you can post the link on social media, e-mail, and so on. The last required UTM parameter is campaign name (`utm_campaign`) that serves as the unique identifier for the campaign. If you are promoting your 2016 summer reading program, you might use the campaign name `summer-read-2016` to distinguish it from the prior year's campaign name for the same event.

The two optional UTM parameters are `utm_term` and `utm_content`, and they just provide Google Analytics with additional information. The campaign term (`utm_term`) is useful if you are using Google AdWords' paid search that identified specific keywords to trigger an advertisement. You can ignore this option if you do not use paid search for marketing. The campaign content (`utm_content`) allows you to distinguish between similar links and is especially useful for A/B testing. For example, you could create two versions of the same post on Facebook with two different images and could differentiate them by using the `utm_content` parameter to label one as `image-a` and the other as `image-b`. This way you can distinguish between the traffic generated by both posts and identify which one was more effective.

Now that you know your UTM parameter options, here is an example of a Campaign URL:

```
http://libcal.uccs.edu/
booking/groupstudy?utm_
medium=social&utm_
source=facebook&utm_
campaign=studyroom-reservations-
spring-2016
```

Let's break down this long Campaign URL. The `http://libcal.uccs.edu/booking/groupstudy` is the original link to the desired landing page and the `?` indicates the start of the UTM parameters. This example uses the three required UTM parameters. The campaign medium is `social`, which our library uses to identify any Campaign URL listed on a social media website. The campaign source is `facebook` because this specific Campaign URL was shared on a Facebook post. The campaign name is `studyroom-reservations-spring-2016` since it was part of a marketing campaign to promote online study room reservations during the spring 2016 semester.

Campaign URLs tend to be very long, which is annoying to share via social media posts. The quick fix is to use a URL shortening service such as `tinyurl.com`

or `bit.ly` to create a shorter URL. This shorter URL still contains the UTM parameters you added, so Google Analytics is still able to track that data. This makes Campaign URLs useful not only for online marketing, but you can even track Campaign URLs on print flyers! Simply use `print` as the campaign medium when creating the Campaign URL and add the shorter Campaign URL link to your flyer.

## Creating a Campaign URL

Google Analytics makes creating Campaign URLs very easy through its form-based Campaign URL builder that generates UTM-tagged links—just enter the URL for the link you intend to share and then add your UTM parameters into the required fields. This generates your Campaign URL for you, so you can just post it.

*Google Analytics Campaign URL Builder*  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/1033867>

However, take care creating your UTM parameters and be consistent in their usage so the campaign data is accurate and easy to compare over time. UTM parameters are case-sensitive and report exactly as they are labeled in the campaign URL. Always use the same terminology to describe the same source, too. Using `twitter` in one link and `twitter.com` in another will result in two separate Twitter-related entries in your Google Analytics reports. Also, do not accidentally use the same UTM-tagged link on another social media channel. If you share the link on Facebook and accidentally leave the campaign source as `twitter`, the data Google Analytics collects and reports will be inaccurate.

If you share social media posting duties with other members of your library, it is helpful to create a spreadsheet to document the controlled vocabulary used to describe the campaign source and medium and give a structure for future campaign names. This is also useful for documenting previous campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

## Viewing Your Campaign URL Data: Campaign Reports and Social Users Flow Report

You can measure the success of specific campaigns using the Campaigns reports found under the Acquisition section in Google Analytics (figure 7.2). In the All Campaigns report, click on a campaign name to compare incoming traffic across different sources and mediums to identify which ones generated the most referrals. You can use this data to guide future decisions about where you concentrate your marketing efforts.

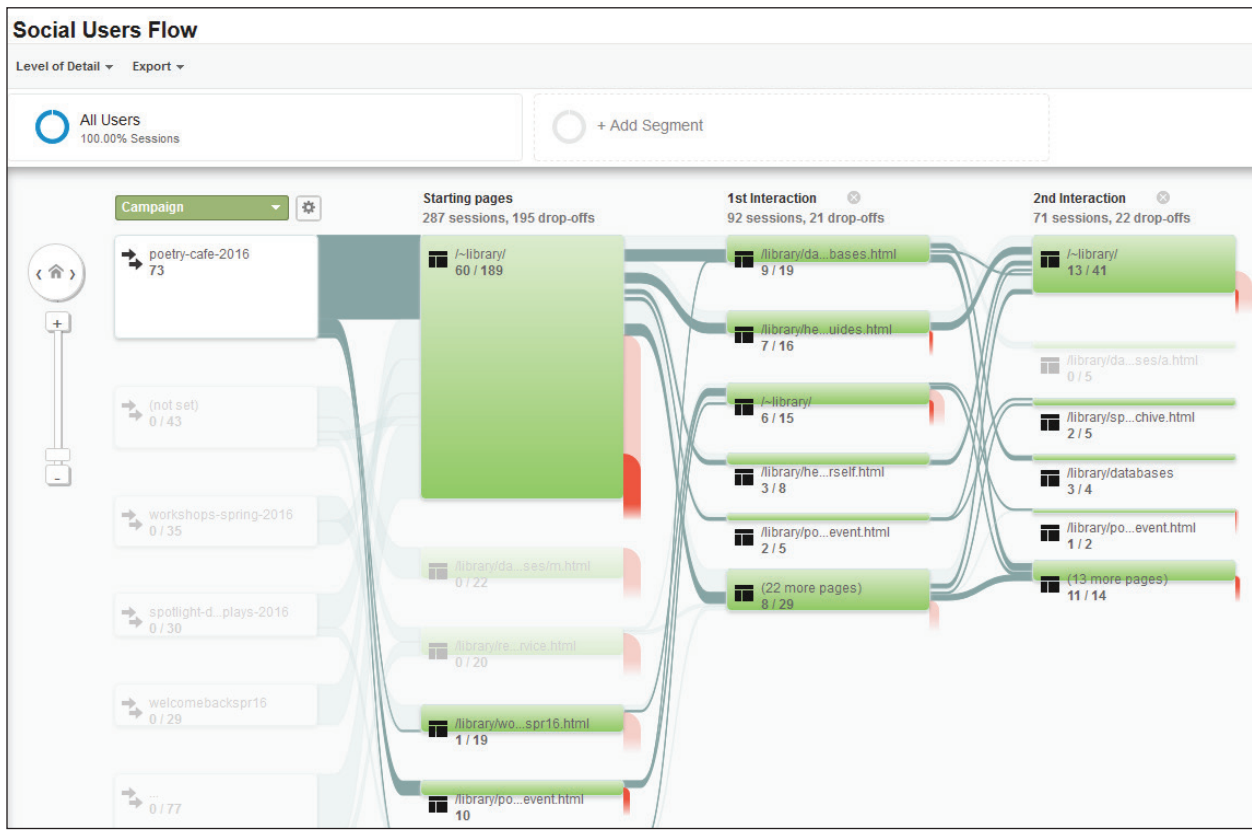
The Social Users Flow report (figure 7.3) visualizes where social media users enter your website and the following web pages they visit, if any. You can modify this report to track the user flow from sessions generated by Campaigns! This makes it possible to

monitor the users from specific social media posts to determine what these users did after they enter your website, including how they navigated your website and where they exited (drop-offs).

While the Social Users Flow report and Campaign

Primary Dimension: Campaign Source Medium Source / Medium Other									
Plot Rows Secondary dimension Sort Type: Default									
Campaign	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions		
	Sessions	% New Sessions	New Users	Bounce Rate	Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Event Registration Goal (Goal 1 Conversion Rate)	Event Registration Goal (Goal 1 Completions)	Goal 1: Event Registration Goal
	190	42.11%	80	47.89%	2.28	00:02:07	10.53%	20	
	% of Total: 14.45% (1,315)	Avg for View: 59.85% (-29.85%)	% of Total: 10.17% (787)	Avg for View: 38.71% (23.74%)	Avg for View: 2.38 (-3.01%)	Avg for View: 00:02:15 (-5.80%)	Avg for View: 4.33% (142.84%)	% of Total: 35.09% (57)	
1. workshops-spring-2016	155 (81.58%)	38.06%	59 (73.75%)	50.32%	2.26	00:02:03	5.81%	9 (45.00%)	
2. publishing-workshop-spring-2016	28 (14.74%)	60.71%	17 (21.25%)	35.71%	2.57	00:02:11	39.29%	11 (55.00%)	

**Figure 7.2** Campaigns report, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs



**Figure 7.3** Social Users Flow report, Google Analytics, University of Colorado Colorado Springs

reports are useful, the Campaign URL becomes a powerful custom segment for many other Google Analytics reports. Do you want to know if users generated from your Facebook posts return to use your site? You can create a custom segment based on Facebook as the campaign source to analyze just those users in Google Analytics New vs. Returning report.

## Measuring the Success of a Social Media Campaign URL

What if you have loftier goals than simply driving social media traffic to your website? For instance, what if you promote a workshop on social media and want to track how many of those users registered for the workshop? Enter conversions! Conversions are any desired action that can be tracked in Google Analytics. If you want to learn more about this useful metric, chapter 1 of this issue of *Library Technology Reports* introduces the concept of conversions. From the social media perspective, you should generate a list of actions you know you want your social media users to do. For example, if you regularly post social media messages about workshops or event activities that require registration, you should track the online registration form submissions as a conversion in Google Analytics.

Since my library uses Springshare's LibCal to manage our library workshops, I will demonstrate this process using LibCal. LibCal creates a unique URL for each workshop, and I convert this link into a Campaign URL before sharing it on my library's various social media presences. The Campaign URL takes users to the workshop web page that has an online registration form for users to sign up for the workshop. The registration form is tracked with a GTM event tag<sup>4</sup> so Google Analytics records each time a user clicks the registration form's Submit button as an event. My library also tracks that specific event as a conversion because the number of workshop registrations is one of the metrics we use to measure the success of our LibCal website.

*Springshare's LibCal*  
[www.springshare.com/libcal](http://www.springshare.com/libcal)

My library already tracks workshop registrations on our LibCal website as a Google Analytics conversion. In order to measure the effectiveness of a social media Campaign URL for marketing a specific workshop, all I need to do is create a Campaign URL for that workshop and post it. Google Analytics All Campaigns report displays data by campaign name, including the total number of conversions and the conversion rate for that workshop registration goal (depicted earlier in figure 7.2). This report can even drill down into that campaign's source so you can tell which social media channel is more effective in marketing these workshops.

## Conclusion

If you rely only on the built-in analytics provided by Facebook, Twitter, and other networks, you are missing out on crucial data that can help you gauge how your social media interacts with your various library website and online tools. Google Analytics can provide you with a wealth of data about your library's social media presence, but only if you consistently use Campaign URLs when sharing links to your website on your social media accounts. It takes time, planning, and careful documentation of the UTM parameters you use, but the investment is worth the effort.

## Notes

1. David Lee King, "Analytics, Goals, and Strategy for Social Media," *Library Technology Reports* 51, no. 1 (January 2015): 26–32.
2. Mark, "Understanding Direct Traffic in Google Analytics," *Megalytic Blog*, April 14, 2015, <https://megalytic.com/blog/understanding-direct-traffic-in-google-analytics>.
3. Andrew Nguyen, "Finally . . . Some Clarity: Best Practices for UTM Parameters," *Pipeline Marketing Blog*, Bizible, March 23, 2015, [www.bizible.com/blog/best-practices-utm-parameters-tagging-urls](http://www.bizible.com/blog/best-practices-utm-parameters-tagging-urls).
4. "Google Analytics Events," Google Tag Manager Help, accessed March 15, 2016, <https://support.google.com/tagmanager/answer/6106716?hl=en>.

## Notes

---