**TMP MO: Why should I care about GA4?**

**Dara:** [00:00:12] Hello and thanks for joining us in The Measure Pod, a place where we tackle some of the analytics industry's big topics and try and have a little bit of fun along the way too. I'm Dara. I'm joined as always by Dan. Hey Dan.

**Dan:** [00:00:25] How's it going?

**Dara:** [00:00:25] Good thanks, how are you?

**Dan:** [00:00:26] Yeah, not bad. Hot.

**Dara:** [00:00:28] It is hot. It's hot here in the UK. We're having one of our rare heat waves where we like to complain about it. So Dan, what have you been up to this week?

**Dan:** [00:00:36] I've actually been running back to back GTM training sessions , which is held in our recording booth in the office, which feels like a sauna. So two days in a sauna, in the office, teaching GTM. The sessions are great , the conditions, maybe not so much.

**Dara:** [00:00:52] Oh.

**Dan:** [00:00:52] And how about you mate?

**Dara:** [00:00:53] Yeah, I'm not too bad thanks. I've as you know, recently changed roles. So I've taken on the Managing Director role at Measurelab. So to be completely honest, I've been trying to figure out what it is that I should be doing. So I'm getting involved in lots and just trying to figure out where the best use of my time is really

**Dan:** [00:01:09] Awesome. So I should be on my best behavior then, should I?

**Dara:** [00:01:12] Exactly I'm taking notes.

**Dan:** [00:01:14] Yeah.

**Dara:** [00:01:14] So tell me, Dan, what are we going to talk about this week?

**Dan:** [00:01:18] Well, I thought this week we can try and answer a question that a lot of our clients have been put into us, which is why should I care about GA4. It's something that we're coming up against day to day something we're having to justify to our clients. And it was actually over a beer the other day that I thought, you know, we should probably have a really clear idea and maybe come down to like a couple of points that we can say, this is why you should care.

**Dara:** [00:01:40] And I think I was probably asking you this very same question only a few months ago. So it is very much a hot topic isn't it. And I think we probably, from that conversation, if I remember correctly, boiled it down to three main reasons which we'll expand on today, and I'll look to you to provide your, as always experts view on these different points`

**Dan:** [00:01:59] Yeah, great .

**Dara:** [00:02:00] Okay, so the first reason I think we can agree on, is that all of Google's engineering efforts are going into GA4 and overtime, UA is going to be getting less and less support. Is that fair to say Dan?

**Dan:** [00:02:14] That's a really nice way of putting that we've got no choice right? Which is maybe the less delicate way of phrasing it. But Yeah, Google have said that all of their development efforts and their focusing their attention and energy is going on to GA4. So , there is no longer any development happening in Universal Analytics, the same way that when they moved from Classic to Universal, did they did the same. They will support a legacy system, but they will not improve or make advancements on that tool going forward. It's not going anywhere , but who knows, right? We're in the hands, I suppose.

**Dara:** [00:02:44] So there's no need to panic straight away, but I guess at the same time, it would be prudent for people to start the process of migrating over to GA4, running the two in parallel for a period of time to give them that chance to understand that the new platform and the changes.

**Dan:** [00:03:01] Yeah, for sure. Parallel tracking is the stuff that Google are saying at the moment, and it's the kind of stuff that we're coming at it from too. We're not saying to switch off UA in any rush, we're saying that GA4 is the future. Whether we like it or not. It's an opportunity while we parallel track not to, not to kind of test out GA4 and understand whether we want to use it. This is a perfect opportunity to learn it yourself so that when the inevitable switch happens, that we're kind of not worried about it. So it is what it is, right. Google have moved on to a new tool, we're like, okay, we didn't ask for it, but that's cool.

**Dara:** [00:03:34] Reason number one is you know I maybe put it in a nicer way. But as you say, there's no choice really. And it's similar in that respect to when Classic GA moved to Universal in the fact that it was always going to be a timeline before people were left with no choice, but to move to the new version. But the difference this time round is that GA4 is actually a very different beast. One of the key differences, I think that we were talking about is the fact that effectively everything under the hood has changed. And, I think I'm right in saying that you would be of the opinion that it's maybe a little bit more accessible in some ways.

**Dan:** [00:04:07] Yeah, I think it's easier to understand. And I think I might have to justify that very quickly as someone that's been using Universal Analytics for the last six years, almost daily. The reason I'm saying it's easier to understand is purely down to the data model, and how that works. So Google Analytics 4 just tracks events. It just joins these events together under a user ID or some kind of device ID, whatever it uses to stitch these together. And then you have a string of things that are happening in a sequence. And I think thats fundamentally a lot simpler to grasp, than things like data scopes right, what is a session scope dimension and a hit scope metric and all the other nuances to Universal Analytics. But why finally come to realize is that if I was explaining this to someone that's never used it before, it is so much easier to explain how GA4 works to Universal Analytics, and I have to do that. I run GA4 training sessions alongside Universal Analytics, GTM and Data Studio. And it's a lot easier. I can tell you for a fact, it's a lot easier to explain GA4. The only time GA4 actually is hard is for people that know Universal Analytics inside and out. So unfortunately it's people like us Dara, because we're so used to Universal Analytics. We're so used to knowing the ins and outs of all the nuances and intricacies of Universal that actually this is a change and change is difficult.

**Dara:** [00:05:24] Yeah, it's interesting we're set in our ways to an extent aren't we and it's like any platform really, or any software when it, when it changes drastically, there's that initial, almost negative reaction from people who are familiar with it because it's so different. So I think it is important to point out that there is a learning curve where you almost have to un-train some of your knowledge and switch your mindset towards this, to be honest, probably a more suitable data model anyway for the combination of web plus app, which most brands are looking to track across these days anyway, so GA Universal was probably a little bit behind the curve in that respect.

**Dan:** [00:05:59] Exactly, yeah. Someone put this to me quite nicely and they said that when Google got their hands on Urchin Analytics, the concept of the session made perfect sense. They're logging on they're going onto this website and then they will log off after doing something. Whereas with the ever increasingly connected age we're in now, these are not really the cases. People don't decide to have a session on a website or think of it in that context. It's more like my phone buzzes, I pick it up, I click a link, put it back down. My phone buzzes, I'd go back into a browser, oh that was that thing I left behind. I'll have a quick look. This is purely my opinion here, that sessions are no longer relevant because people don't browse in sessions anymore. They have these micro moments, and then we have this legacy definition of sessions we're pulling across. Now that we don't have these things in the way we just track events and they're stitched together in a timeline, a small asterix there, they do have sessions in GA4 , I do know that , maybe we'll touch that again another time. But also we have to think about their target demographic of Google Analytics 4. The reality is for people like you and me, Dara as analytics professionals or specialists, we're not marketers. And this is a marketing tool built for marketers. They want more marketers to have a lower barrier of entry so that they can use the data to maybe improve their marketing performance or increase their marketing spend, you know, that's their focus. It is a marketing tool and always have to remind myself of this.

**Dara:** [00:07:15] But it's interesting you say that because even though that's absolutely true and it's always been the case. The third of our reasons why people should care about GA4 is actually for people a little bit more like us. Because GA4 is actually making the tool more powerful for analysts. Do you want to talk a little bit about why that's the case?

**Dan:** [00:07:36] Yeah, for sure. So I obviously, I just mentioned that it's a marketing tool in the marketing platform built for marketers and all that jazz. Which is contradictory almost and it's a deliberate choice that we've got these three points and that's because Universal Analytics had a way of trying to embed them all together. So if you're a marketer or an analyst or data engineer, you have to use the same tool. Whereas now what they've done is they've kind of separated out these features. And so the way that it's starting to materialize is that the GA4 UI is a great place for a marketer to be. They can go into the advertising workspace. They can have a look at different attribution models. They can build some custom reports in the reports workspace, and they can connect it to their ads platforms and can share audiences. I think it's a really powerful tool and definitely an area of investment from Google. But, the reason, going back to the point, the reason why I said it's better for analysts is because of things like the BigQuery export. So you can now for free connect and export your raw data to BigQuery. So that in itself is a better tool for analysts or analytics specialists. It's not just about using the UI for marketing reasons or trying to make a marketing UI work for analyst reasons. What we're saying is you have access to the data and you can make sense of it elsewhere. So that's the key one and probably in every GA4 conversation you'll have is BigQuery, this BigQuery that , it's going to be part of the conversation. And a lot of people might think, well, I don't use BigQuery. I don't know BigQuery. Maybe we should do another episode of why should I care about Google BigQuery? And maybe we will. But the reality is, is that it's just a change from Google's perspective of who's using them. So if you are an analyst or you consider yourself an analyst or a data person in any way, turn it on, have a play. I think it's going to be the place for people like us to be using the data in the, not too distant future.

**Dara:** [00:09:22] So quick follow on question on that. Would you say as a result of that Dan, that it's become any more difficult for marketers to use? So has this come at the cost of that fact, that GA is primarily for marketers?

**Dan:** [00:09:35] I don't think so. I think they've become more focused in what their platform is doing, which I quite like to be honest, I like that there's no ambiguity. So under the bonnet without going too much into it, GA4 is Firebase. And if you have an app with Google Analytics on there, you would be very aware of what Firebase is and there's a Firebase UI. So, one thing to note is that technically there are multiple places you can view the data. You can go into the Firebase UI and you've got data there. You've got the GA UI and you've got data there and you've got the data in BigQuery. And there's even an API. So the Firebase interface is for app developers. The GA4 interface is predominantly for marketers. And the BigQuery export is for analysts. They're creating an environment for us to have the tools we need without having to create a one size fits all approach. That being said, they have made some ways of improving the analyst function within the UI too. So for example, just off the top of my head, there's no sampling and the reports workspace now. And there's no longer any collection limits with GA4. I'm talking about the free version here. We hear rumors of the 360 version coming at a later date, but it's not yet announced it's not yet out. So comparing the free version of Universal to GA4, you've got no limits in the amount of data you can collect and there's no sampling in the reports and the only ever improves the use of GA as a product, whether you're a marketer or an analyst.

**Dara:** [00:10:55] Yeah, really interesting, Dan. So actually rather than the improvements in GA4, for analysts coming at the expense of marketers, it's actually more of a case of GA4 evolving to cater for multiple different use cases on multiple different types of users and power users as well. Okay, to recap, I think we kind of distilled down the reasons for why people should give the time and attention to GA4 down to three core areas. The first one, which is unavoidable and nobody can argue with, is that all of Google's development efforts are going to be going into GA4. It effectively is Google Analytics moving forward. So there's no choice, but to care about it but there's no need to panic just yet if you're still using Universal Analytics, you can run the two in parallel, but now is a good time to start to understand GA4. Second reason, this is an interesting one because I think you and I both struggled to get our heads around GA4 initially because we've got so many habits and preconceived ideas about analytics having worked with Universal for so long. But once you get your head around the differences, or if you haven't used Universal Analytics before, then actually it's potentially an easier platform to get your head into and to be honest, I'm sure you agree with this, but I'll be quite glad not to have to explain scopes to anyone again, which is definitely a benefit.

**Dan:** [00:12:16] I mean, running GA training sessions for coming on five years now, and I still don't have a really pithy, concise way of explaining how they work or what they are. I don't know about you?

**Dara:** [00:12:24] The same for me. It's always the question in training or client conversations that I don't relish because equally I haven't found a simple way to explain it. It's a tricky concept to get your head around. So the simpler data model of GA4, all based around users and a stream of events, as you explained earlier. And I think it's an easier model for people to get their heads around. And the third reason that we coverage is, and I think you went into quite a bit of detail on this one. It's the fact that even though it's still a marketing analytics tool, but with some of the benefits of GA4 like the BigQuery exports, it's allowing analysts to get their hands on the data and run more advanced analytics on top of that. So it's catering for different audiences now, not just marketing professionals, but analysts as well.

**Dan:** [00:13:13] So in other words, one, you don't have a choice. Two, it's easier to understand, trust me. And three it's better for people like me.

**Dara:** [00:13:21] That's a much shorter on probably more honest conclusion than mine Dan, for that.

Okay, brilliant. So, enough for now. It's a topic we're undoubtedly going to come back to and talk about in lots more detail over further discussions, but what have you been doing in this last week, Dan, to, to switch off, to wind down after a long day, looking at looking at data, talking about data.

**Dan:** [00:13:47] So I'll tell you what I've done. I bought myself a new X-Box. I got the baby Series S not the Series X, and I love it. I've never had an X-Box before and I love it. I'm a huge fan. But all I've been doing is playing classic Doom on this brand new console. I've had this for a couple of weeks now, and I don't think I've played a single next gen game on my next gen console. Who knows, maybe eventually I'll get to the next gen versions. But for now I'm enjoying my time playing a very old game on a very new console, upscaled to 4k and I love it.

**Dara:** [00:14:19] I'm not even going to pretend I understood half of those words you said Dan. Unless it's Flimbos Quest on the Commodore 64. I'm not interested.

**Dan:** [00:14:31] I have to admit Dara, I'm too young to know what that is, but I'll Google it and come back to you.

**Dara:** [00:14:35] You don't know what you're missing out on, honestly. So I've been doing something very different. I've been trying to get out in this glorious, hot weather that we've had lately. And I'm desperately trying to finish off a log cabin that's in the back of my garden, sitting there, unfinished, untreated. So I've been out there in the evenings after work and spending a bit of time at the weekends as well in the garden, soaking up the sunshine.

**Dan:** [00:14:59] So that's you going outside and working on a log cabin and that's me trying to hide away from the sun and the heat playing Doom on my X-Box.

**Dara:** [00:15:07] Yeah, but when it's built, I'm going to put a Commodore 64 in and play Flimbos Quest.

**Dan:** [00:15:12] Amazing. Maybe we can get a nice little LAN session going and invite the Measurelab crew around.

**Dara:** [00:15:17] Why not?

**Dan:** [00:15:19] Do you know what a LAN session is?

**Dara:** [00:15:21] No.

**Dan:** [00:15:24] Oh

**Dara:** [00:15:24] Smile and nod, smile and nod. All right, enough of this mockery enough mocking me and my lack of gaming knowledge. That's a wrap for this time round. You can find out more about us over at measurelab.co.uk, or you can email us at hello@measurelab.co.uk if you've got any questions or even if you want to suggest a topic of discussion for myself and Dan. Otherwise join us next time. For some more analytics, ramblings, I've been Dara as always joined by Dan bye for me.

**Dan:** [00:15:55] And bye for me.

**Dara:** [00:15:57] See you next time.

**Dan:** [00:16:10] All right, mate. Thank you again. I'll catch you later. Have a good evening.

**Dara:** [00:16:13] Say you too. Bye.

**Dan:** [00:16:14] Bye bye.