Measured Opinions #6: Do you really need GA360?

[00:00:17] **Dara:** Hello and thanks for joining us in The Measure Pod, a podcast for analytics enthusiasts, where we try and make sense of some of the hot topics in the analytics industry, and try and have a little bit of fun along the way. I'm Dara, MD at Measurelab, and I'm joined as always by Measurelab's longest serving Analytics Consultant, Dan.

[00:00:35] **Dan:** Hey, Dara.

[00:00:36] **Dara:** Hey Dan, what have you been up to this week?

[00:00:38] **Dan:** So this week I've in updating our GA4 training slides. So a couple of weeks ago, Google analytics for really stay new version of the UI. I'm sure if anyone's been in the UI, they've seen the left now that looks completely different now. And although that's great and I'm a big fan, it means I've had to go back and update all of our collateral with the new screen grabs. So a bit tedious, but has to be done.

[00:00:58] **Dara:** I very much doubt it's going to be the last time. You'll have to do that Dan.

[00:01:01] **Dan:** Yeah I'm very aware that it's going to keep changing if the last couple of months are anything to go by. Anyway, Dara, what you been up to this week?

[00:01:07] **Dara:** Um, we've been pretty busy pitching for some new business. So we've just submitted a response to tender today for a really interesting potential clients that we'd be really happy to work with. And we've also had a couple of good introductory calls with some interesting brands lately as well. It's been great to see those conversations happening.

[00:01:25] **Dan:** Awesome.

[00:01:25] **Dara:** Okay, so what are we going to talk about this week Dan?

[00:01:27] **Dan:** This week we're going to go through a couple of questions to see if you really need to move up to Google Analytics 360 from the free version.

[00:01:34] **Dara:** Okay, great. This is something we're obviously both really interested in Dan and we've spoken both together and also with clients about this many times in the past. So the question really is, do you need GA360?

[00:01:46] **Dan:** Yeah, absolutely. And in the context of Universal Analytics, not GA4.

[00:01:49] **Dara:** Is it gonna hurt you to not talk about GA4?

[00:01:52] **Dan:** it might, it might do.

[00:01:53] **Dara:** We need a swear jar every time you accidentally mentioned GA4 in this episode

[00:01:58] **Dan:** Yeah, for sure.

[00:01:59] **Dara:** Oh sorry.

[00:02:01] **Dan:** So the first thing to check is to see if you're hitting the sampling thresholds when running a report over one month of data. And I use one month of data as a rule of thumb here, because if you can comfortably report in Google Analytics on one full month of data without hitting any sampling thresholds, then it would just make a lot of the reporting we have to do so much easier. At least you can get your monthly reports done without having to batch pull out separate reports and stitch them together outside of Google Analytics. You still might need to do that for your annual reports, but it just saves us having to pull out things by day by week by by even fortnight I suppose. The idea there is, if you can comfortably report on a calendar month in Google Analytics with no sampling, then you might be okay.

[00:02:45] **Dara:** Yeah, the dreaded sampling is definitely the right place to start here. It's probably reason number one why you would be strongly considering moving to 360. But of course it's not just about the timeframe of data that you're pulling as you know Dan, it's also the data itself that you're pulling. There are some standard reports within GA where they'll never be sampled, so the sampling will kick in with the 500,000 session threshold when you've got a segment applied to the data, or in some cases where you're adding a secondary dimension. So it's when the data's not pre available when the sampling kicks in to speed up the loading of the reports. So you could be a high volume website, but with very basic use cases for reporting. And if you just wanted to have, say for example sessions and conversions by a single dimension, then potentially you could get that even going back for long periods of time without the sampling. But that's pretty unusual that that would be the case.

[00:03:41] **Dan:** If you were to go 360, that's where that threshold gets raised. Believe it or not, there's still a threshold applied, it's just the cap is raised somewhat to a 100,000,000 sessions. A big old jump, but if you've got 500,000 sessions or less in a single month, then you're probably going to be okay.

[00:03:57] **Dara:** Another question to ask yourself if you're using the free version of GA is if you have a need for more custom dimensions and custom metrics.

[00:04:06] **Dan:** Yeah so you can get 20 of each on the free version of GA, so we get up to 20 custom dimensions and up to 20 custom metrics. If you were to go 360, that cap actually increases to 200 of each. So again, another big jump between the free and the paid for versions of the product. So if you're kind of getting to the edge of that 20 or at 20 and you still got use cases for more, then this is something that might be able to help in that situation. Speaking about the limits again, another limit to be mindful of within the free version is that the amount of data you send into GA is also capped per month. What we're talking about is the monthly hit limit. And a hit is any piece of data that gets sent into Google Analytics, traditionally page views and events. We get 10 million a month for free within the free license. If you're getting close to that, I would say it's worth considering, or if you're exceeding that on a regular basis then you're probably going to be contacted by Google at some point. So it's probably best to get in front of that before that happens.

[00:05:01] **Dara:** Exactly right Dan, if you're going in excess of that 10 million a month, you run the risk of being contacted by Google and having them ask you to either throttle your data collection, or suggest that you move to 360, because the terms of service only cover you up to 10 million hits a month. Whereas, if you move to 360, you're starting on around a billion hits a month, depending on the license.

[00:05:25] **Dan:** It's really interesting seeing this recently with the introduction of Core Web Vitals, for example. So a solution to track Core Web Vitals in Google Analytics is to log events. But what that means is each page in Google Analytics can become 4, 5, 6 hits now. Even if you think, oh, I'm hitting 2 million hits a month, that's no problem. And then tomorrow, if you implement the Core Web Vital trackers, scroll depth trackers at every 10% increment, that 2 million hits per month can quickly balloon well past the 10 million hits per month without us even realizing. So there's a way to check that in GA under the property settings. It's worth checking that every now and then it's not a day-to-day thing, but every couple of months or so, just to check to see what you're averaging, just to make sure you're within the terms of service.

[00:06:11] **Dara:** That's a good point. Some people might mistakenly think it's sessions or users, but it's actually that full collection of all event types. So checking that in the property settings is the best way to keep an eye on how much data you're actually sending through each month. So far we've been focused largely around limits. So hit limits, sampling and custom dimensions and metrics. Another question to ask yourself is around the integrations that you might need. If you're advertising through DV360 or Search Ads 360, or if you're a Salesforce customer, then there are reasons why you might want to consider moving to GA360. Do you to talk a little bit about that Dan?

[00:06:49] **Dan:** Yeah, for sure. The first thing to note is that these connectors to DV360, SA360 and Campaign Manager 360 are all only with the 360 license of Google Analytics. And I will acknowledge the swear jar entry now, but with GA4 these aren't. But the reason, so you'd want to connect those because you can happily use those products without connecting them to Google Analytics, is the two way connector they provide. Being able to share audiences from Google Analytics, so clusters of users, with those products to facilitate better targeting and remarketing. And the opposite side of that is the data it imports into Google Analytics. So it imports things like your cost data or impression data, or in the case of Salesforce, any offline conversion data. So to get these integrations you'll have to be a 360 customer, not only to be able to report on the data centrally in Google Analytics, but also to be able to share that data back out to these platforms for optimization. And speaking of the integrations, another one we haven't mentioned yet is the BigQuery connector. It can export all of that raw data that it collects into BigQuery for us to use SQL to be able to interrogate the data at a more granular level than you can do in the interface itself. The question to ask is really, if you have proficiency with SQL, or if you have a team of people or data scientists or analysts that are able to use BigQuery to make the most of that data export.

[00:08:11] **Dara:** It's time for me to cancel out your swear jar entry now, by saying, if you're GA4, you get the BigQuery exports without needing to be on the enterprise version. But if you're Universal GA you do need to be 360 to get this daily BigQuery export. There are other ways around that, you can pull the data out of GA through the API and then pump it into BigQuery. But it's not the seamless integration that you get with the GA360 BigQuery export.

[00:08:37] **Dan:** And one other difference there to add back to the GA4 jar is that the export with Universal Analytics 360 actually backdates 13 months. So if I sign up for 360 today and then connect BigQuery also today, the last 13 months of raw data will be exported to BigQuery. What it means is we can very quickly run year on year comparisons, models, attribution models, or whatever you want to do. With GA4, even though it's available for free, it only starts feeding data into BigQuery from the moment you connect it. It is one of those things where it is the same feature we say, oh, you get it for free now. But the big benefit that Universal Analytics has over GA4 is the historical data export as well.

[00:09:15] **Dara:** For the next question, let's move a little bit away from the actual tech itself. Another angle to be approaching this from is thinking about who's actually gonna use the features and who's actually gonna use the data. I guess the question is, do you have a team and/or an agency that's going to be using GA360?

[00:09:35] **Dan:** this is a really interesting one because obviously we're biased, right? We are an agency that uses Google Analytics or Google Analytics 360 with our clients. But the idea here stems from this 90/10 rule. We can link off to the original article from Avinash that stated it a while ago. But the 90/10 rule applies to the amount you invest in analytics and the people to use the analytics products. So 10% on the tools or the tech and 90% on the people using it. It sounds kind of crazy when you think about it, but it's just that idea that buying tech won't solve problems. But by investing in people to use the tech will. So whether you agree with that or not, I suppose the idea there is, do you have people more people or availability of people or an agency to come in alongside the GA360 license? Or is it going to be sitting with a marketing team that don't have the time to invest in it because they're busy doing their marketing campaigns. So a slight left turn but one of the last things to think about when you're wondering if you really need GA360 is really thinking about the implementation. The big thing to realize is that the implementation, the code, the tracking of GA and GA360 is identical. It is the same tracking implemented in exactly the same way. So if you don't have a good, efficient, clean setup implemented already in your free version of Google Analytics, going to 360 is going to give you those additional benefits we've already mentioned, but it's going to be based on that same non-perfect data.

[00:11:02] **Dara:** Yeah, exactly. So in other words, if there's implementation issues, do an audit, fix the implementation, make sure it's up to spec. And then when you move to 360, you don't have to do any reimplementation. There'll be a switch flicked in the background, you get moved to 360, and all the existing implementation will remain as is.

[00:11:23] **Dan:** Yeah. And you might even consider waiting 13 months after That as well. And it might seem like a long time, but if your primary reason for going 360 is the BigQuery export, it doesn't matter how many months you get backdated if it's all dodgy data, right? So if you draw a line in the sand and say, my data is good from today. Then going to 360 now to get that BigQuery export is not going to fix anything for you. Unless you are proficient enough to go back and cleanse that data in BigQuery so that you can make it useful in which case go for it. Otherwise, and again another entry into the swear jar, you may as well just use GA4 which feeds the data into BigQuery from when you turn it on. In which case, then there's nothing lost.

[00:12:04] **Dara:** That leads nicely into my recap I think, because this is something that we've had many conversations with clients in the past Dan. Often people will think they need to move to 360 before they're even maximizing the free version of GA. So our advice, there can be business cases where you do need to move to 360 sooner, but in many cases there's a lot more value you can get out of the free version of GA by pushing it to its limits. And then by pushing it to its limits, it can help build that business case and actually prove that there's going to be an ROI for the license cost. So the key takeaway here is make sure your implementation is up to scratch while you're using the free version of GA, push it to its limits, make sure you fully understand what you're not getting from the free version and what the business cases are for the 360 features. And then when you move to 360, you get the additional features, and you can hit the ground running. Okay, that's the work talk over and done with what have you been doing in this last week to wind down Dan?

[00:13:05] **Dan:** So anyone that knows me knows that I'm a huge Star Trek fan or dare I say, fanatic. And Star Trek: Lower Decks series two came out last week. So I'm two episodes in and it's awesome. I've been rewatching series one in preparation and just started series two. I highly recommend it.

[00:13:21] **Dara:** I'm amazed. It's taken you this many episodes to mention Star Trek Dan.

[00:13:25] **Dan:** I had to find a convenient time to mention it. There was too much skateboarding things to talk about before. So I thought we'd start with Star Trek now. So anyway Dara, what have you done to wind down?

[00:13:34] **Dara:** Well, I actually booked a holiday, an overseas holiday, which used to be a fairly normal thing to do, but it seemed really alien to actually do it this time around. So I'm going to go and see my eldest sister and my niece and nephew in Lanzarote for 10 days. So I'm really looking forward to it going somewhere different, getting on a plane. It's going to feel strange doing it all with a mask, and it's been two years, but it's going to be really nice. I'm really looking forward to it.

[00:14:03] **Dan:** That sounds great. And to see family that you haven't seen that much time and to double that with a holiday as well, it sounds awesome.

[00:14:10] **Dara:** I think that's a wrap for this week. So you can find out more about us as always over at measurelab.co.uk. Or if you'd like to get in touch, you can email us on hello@measurelab.co.uk, or you can find us on LinkedIn and ask us any questions or even suggest our next topic. So join us next time for more analytics chit-chat. I've been Dara, joined by Dan. So it's by for me.

[00:14:34] **Dan:** And bye from me.

[00:14:34] **Dara:** See you next time.

[00:14:52] **Dara:** Is that what it is that how it works again? God, it's been a while since I've had to explain this