The Measure Pod: #67 GA4 features we need to see in 2023 (with Usman Qureshi @ Spiralyze)

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### Intro

[00:00:15] **Daniel:** Hello and welcome to The Measure Pod, I'm your host Dan, and on this podcast we talk about all things Google Analytics 4. In today's episode, we have a special guest with us today Usman who'll be joining us to talk about updates and improvements we'd like to see in GA4 in the year 2023. Usman is a digital marketing expert and has extensive experience working with GA, so I'm excited about picking his brains and getting his perspective on the future of GA4 and what it can look like.

[00:00:38] **Daniel:** We'll be exploring a wide range of topics from new features and capabilities to the way GA4 could better service the needs of businesses and marketers. Whether you're a GA4 user yourself or just interested in learning a bit more about the platform, be sure to tune in for an exciting and informative episode of The Measure Pod.

[00:00:53] **Daniel:** So first things first, Usman, welcome to the show. But I do have to admit, I thought I'd give this a go as Dara is not here. I tried to replace him with ChatGPT, and that was a generated intro from ChatGPT, and I just wondered if it would work.

[00:01:07] **Usman:** Hey Dan, thanks for having me here, glad to be here as well. Amazing how everywhere I go ChatGPT is everywhere. So I feel like in a way it is taking over. I mean, if it's replacing Dara as well, I don't know what's next, is it you? I'll be talking to some AI next time.

[00:01:24] **Daniel:** If only, could you imagine, could you imagine joining this and there's no one here, it's just two bots. If you are a first-time listener on the show, Dara is the other co-host of the show and is on annual leave at the moment, he's somewhere in New Zealand having a great time. But anyway, back to you Usman, thank you for joining us. I just wanted to throw that in there just to see if I could get away with it, but it did feel a bit manufactured, but it was very impressive nevertheless.

[00:01:45] **Usman:** It was indeed. And in fact, I thought it was pretty natural, you know, like, it just came off your brain, not from some AI software, I guess that's what makes it scary.

Topic

[00:01:55] **Daniel:** Yeah, exactly. Well, if only I was coherent and as succinct as a bot is. I gave it the input, which is the fact that we are going to be talking about things we want to see in Google Analytics 4 in the year 2023 and this is something that we did last year actually. So this time last year on The Measure Pod, we did an episode about what we want to see in 2022. And it felt almost right being a year later just to do the same again to take a look back. Obviously you weren't on that episode, Usman, but I'll do a quick recap and then to get your views really on what, basically discuss what we need to see in 2023.

[00:02:23] **Daniel:** So Usman, before we jump in and talk about Google Analytics, we like to let our guests introduce themselves so that we don't do a terrible job of doing that. So, tell us Usman, who are you? Where do you work? And how did you get to a point where you are talking to someone like me about Google Analytics 4?

[00:02:36] **Usman:** Thank you, thank you very much, Dan. So my journey began somewhere when I started working in a paid ad agency, obviously you do deal with the GA (Google Analytics) quite a fair bit when you do paid ads and stuff like that. And that was like good years ago and ever since then I've been more and more interested in conversion tracking, GTM, GA and stuff like that, but never really got an opportunity to use it to the max. But fast forward to today I now work in a CRO agency. A bit more obviously CRO focused, but we do use Google Analytics quite a bit and we are just trying to get insights as much as we can, get opportunities where we can, use those insights to test on client sites. This is my journey overall, so I've dabbled in social media marketing, paid marketing, Google Analytics, and I'm going to stick with it, I like it.

[00:03:26] **Daniel:** It's amazing, it has the way to sort of take hold of you and keep you, doesn't it? With things like, especially things like Tag Manager where you feel quite powerful in terms of building tags and seeing it working straight away. It's a bit of an endorphin hit, at least that's the way I think about it.

[00:03:38] **Usman:** It is, like when I did my first tag and I saw that data flowing into GA on the other tab, I was like, well, that's nice. It feels nice like something's kicking, and it really gave me that motivation to keep going further into that direction because there isn't digital analytics or web analytics courses and stuff that you can do really like, at least not a few years ago, now everyone's popping up with a lot of courses, understandably. But you would see data science, you would see data analysis or data analyst positions everywhere. But digital analytics is kind of hidden and whoever finds it, I feel like they really stick to it. So yeah, it definitely has a way to keep you with it, it doesn't let you go.

[00:04:17] **Daniel:** No, it doesn't, it's not actually our choice it's the industry holding onto us. Well, welcome Usman, it is really good to have you on the podcast. And thanks for reaching out on LinkedIn actually, so I put a call out on LinkedIn for someone to talk to in Dara's absence and thanks for reaching out, this will be a great chat. But before we jump into the year 2023, let's take a look back into the past and this time a year ago, I spoke to a colleague of mine called George on episode, I think it was 21 of The Measure Pod, way back a year ago, which feels like a lifetime ago now. And we talked about what we want to see in 2022, and I just thought I would get your views on where we got to really, and see what actually happened.

[00:04:50] **Daniel:** So the top couple of bits that we wanted to see in 2022 were views basically, or some kind of replacement of views, and I think that's still a bug bear to a lot of people because that definitely hasn't come out just yet. Sessions and products or item scope custom dimensions and metrics, updates to the data API, so it actually has all the data in it and a little subpoint there around getting the sheets add-on working for GA4. Enhanced reporting filters, so using things like regex in the kind of standard reports, and then custom channel groupings and there was a couple of honourable mentions Usman around store visits, benchmarking the Google Optimize integration, admin APIs, and measurement protocol. A lot in there to, you know, I don't necessarily want to revisit and just talk about an old episode of the podcast, but the point there is that I already feel that it's still quite relevant. I think a lot of those still are at the top of a lot of our lists, probably both yours and mine actually. And some of those have been addressed, maybe not the ways we expected, but I mean, starting really at the beginning, I mean views, I mean that's the biggest one I think is on everyone's list. Do you know what I don't even think it's going to be addressed at this point if it hasn't already.

[00:05:51] **Usman:** It is quite relevant. In fact, I was going to ask you, hey Dan, how many do you think they have covered? But I think it's hardly one or two maybe at this point. And the views, what they've tried to do is, like for GA4 360, you do have sub properties and stuff like that, but not everyone's a paying customer obviously. And a lot of people who use GA or GA4, are small businesses and I think the biggest problem here is not just the functionality because people are just used to views in UA and they would like to see something similar and when they don't see it, they're feeling lost. Because let's be honest, I felt the same way when I first saw GA4 I'm like, geez, where are views? What am I doing? Where am I? So it's like a video game I play when I start and I don't know about the gameplay. It's kind of like that I'm looking at YouTube, the walk throughs to be honest.

[00:06:36] **Usman:** On the functionality point of view, I think it can be quite helpful to separate if you have multiple websites or regions and if you want to delegate work or give limited access to certain people or only to one property, or not everything. Because if you give access to one, you pretty much get access to all the data streams. So I think that is something that will be on our list whether Google listens to us or not, it won't be maybe there till 2030 when there's GA5 or something like that. It's kind of a feature and a UA aspect we all really got to love. I don't know if they really planned it too much for UA or not, or why they did not include it in GA4, but the sub property thing that they have for GA4 360 could be easily replicated and I hope they would just like they did with GA4’s BigQuery native integration now, which was not available in UA.

[00:07:23] **Usman:** Apart from that, I think the one that I would really love to see and I still haven't been able to, is the GA4s API for Sheets because it really helps you with automation which we've been able to do with UA quite a lot and the next worry is yes, they have started working on API and all that, but it's a bit buggy at the moment.

[00:07:38] **Daniel:** The quotas are destroying us all at the moment and I think we've addressed that a couple of times in the podcast and wrote about it as well, but it's just, spoiler I suppose, one thing that's on my list of things that I need to see addressed in 2023 is for them to address this, the Data API quotas, and that is one of two things I'll be happy with. One, increase them and make them at least usable from a basic level on a free version of Google Analytics 4, which they are not right now. Or alternatively, or as well as, create a way for people to buy more quotas without having to go full 360. Let's just pay to play I don't care at this point, we just need it to work and if we need to spend 5, 10, 15, even $50 a month to get some dashboards working, I think that's going to be more feasible for people to pay than the thousands of dollars a month it might cost them to go to 360.

[00:08:26] **Usman:** I love the idea that you kind of came up with pay as you go sort of thing because not everyone has a need to pay so much. And again, it's kind of painful that you build a beautiful dashboard and now you cannot get data in because, oh geez, you hit the core limits. It's painful for any analyst, for anyone who's made a dashboard who's looking at them, it's just like you create something beautiful and now you can't really use it, it's like having a car without petrol. So, yeah, so it's like a nice car I've got parked there, but I can't really use it, just look at it. I think that's a really good idea to have some sort of subscription or maybe a pay as you go plan where people can use it as much as they want to, or it's required and not really force them. I feel like Google wants everyone to eventually just use BigQuery and you know, pay more money and I get it. So good business strategy Google, touché.

[00:09:15] **Daniel:** Yeah, absolutely. If you think it's kind of down to the bottom line and hard cash I suppose from Google's perspective, I wonder where, or at least my one idea is that the reason they don't have views in GA4 because it's such a weird thing for them to stand so strong and firm to not replicate in GA4. I'm wondering if it's purely a money thing because the backend of Google Analytics is all in BigQuery even on the free version even if you don't use BigQuery yourself, and every time you create a view, you are creating copies of the data. And if you create 10 properties with each one of those 50 views, you know, the amount of data storage costs let alone query costs that Google would have to pay on your behalf is going to become obviously bigger. And by doing it with a one-to-one, one property, all of your data, they only have to maintain one set of tables. If you want the raw data, you pay for the privilege, you know, of storing your data in BigQuery and then, you know, if you do go 360, you mentioned about these sub properties or rollup properties, but you still have to pay for those. You have to pay for them on top of your, they count towards your quotas, your event quotas in a roundabout way.

[00:10:10] **Daniel:** So in a sense, they're still monetising views or sub properties or roll up properties, wherever we want to call them. I'm wondering if it is purely about cash really, for why they don't give it out for free. And I wonder if that's the reason why they're never going to give it out and address it in GA4.

[00:10:24] **Usman:** I think it could be. I mean, at the end of the day it's a business, right? And they’ll want you to pay more. They definitely have higher costs now compared to maybe 5, 10 years ago when not everyone was into analytics or not using GA that much, I think a lot of people realise the importance of it now and they are using it. So end of the day, definitely in the backend, Google's costs have gone up. They're not going to shell it out themselves, they're going to take it from you, from me and, well, not us, our clients hopefully.

[00:10:50] **Daniel:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:10:52] **Usman:** It's like when you are dealing with a Google Analytics account, it kind of becomes part of your life. So it is you and I as well because if we cannot function the way we want to, it really hinders us back from the way we want to work. We are human beings, we do adapt to it and we will, but we would love to see it back, that's the point.

[00:11:08] **Daniel:** Roll with the punches, but you know, I'd rather not get punched in the first instance right.

[00:11:12] **Usman:** Yeah.

[00:11:14] **Daniel:** So Usman I know you've had to think about some bits you want to see in GA4 in the next year or so, give us one that's on the top of your list.

[00:11:20] **Usman:** I think the one that is on the top of my list is a bit of weird one and maybe not something everyone would love. And that is that the segments cannot be applied to the standard reports. The thing is people, I work in a CRO agency, and we believe in reducing any friction that you have from one point to another. Increasing the number of clicks, or me wanting to create a new report or save it as a new report in explorations is something not everyone is keen on. And you would want to do stuff with one clicks, not three, four clicks so I would want to see segments in standard reports.

[00:11:55] **Usman:** Currently, you do have comparisons there, but the thing is you cannot save comparisons for next time and every time you want to use them you have to build them. So like again and again, that is a lot of work for someone who's dealing with a lot of analytics accounts on a daily basis. So I would love to see segments, being able to save and share on standard reports as well. Like we had, well we still have thankfully on UA for whatever time we have left. So I love the fact that I have those shared among different views because sometimes you create segments that can actually be shared in different accounts because they're like generic sort of things. Now I have to go in exploration every time, create a new exploration and create a segment there. It is like really cumbersome and something I'm not really a big fan of, I would love to see that if they can do that after all, why not?

[00:12:41] **Daniel:** Well, exactly. I think why not is going to be an answer or ‘it depends’ or ‘why not’, is probably going to be an answer to a lot of these. You know, I completely agree with this and the thing about comparisons or filters are that they're so basic you have to include or exclude filter at its core principle when you select one dimension. If you wanted to do anything based on sort of behaviour or sequencing or things like that, you can't use comparisons, you can't use filters. And yes, you can use an audience, but that only works from when you click save and you can't retroactively apply that, you have to go into the exploration workspace. And even then, segments only live within one exploration you can't share them between exploration.

[00:13:16] **Daniel:** So it's such a narrow use case now, segments are such a narrow use that it's one of those things that is such a great tool and great functionality and it sounds like you and myself, we use them a hell of a lot in Universal Analytics. So all we're asking for, in a sense, if I understand you right, is just to be able to do the same in GA4.

[00:13:33] **Usman:** Pretty much, yeah I mean, if you look at data without context, it's not giving you anything. But that's what segments do, they provide you a context that you can use and actually glean or get some insights. But if you don't have the ability to do that easily, and as you said, it's narrowed down to just one exploration, it kind of like takes you off like, why, why are you doing this to me?

[00:13:54] **Daniel:** I have a proposition for you then Usman. If you had to choose between having sampling in the standard reports, but you can use segments or never having sampling like there is at the moment, but you can't use segments, you have to keep them in the exploration workspace, what would you choose?

[00:14:08] **Usman:** Well, it's an easy answer. I would still want segments because I can reduce sampling with narrowing down the dates or changing a few things and it's okay as long as it gives me some context, right? But if I don't have the option or ability to do that at all, and I have to do every time and exploration, it's like going into another room you know what I mean? So if I have something in another room, I'm a bit lazy to go and pick it up from there. But if it's right here on my desk, it’s easier for me to use.

[00:14:33] **Daniel:** Yeah, I completely get you. The reason I kind of put that proposition to you is just, I was just thinking, I'm trying to imagine myself as someone at Google and it's like, well, if every time you apply a segment it's reprocessing the data and going back to the costing, right. It costs money to do that, and that's why they introduce sampling, so it doesn't spiral out of control. In the reports workspace, there's no sampling. So I'm wondering if all of that's aggregated safe, cheap data and if they, the reason they've kept them to the kind of the two environments separate is because they've got a cheap one, keeping it cheap because it's sampled. I'm just wondering if they were to merge them, it would have to introduce sampling again, but quite right. We can work around sampling and we've been doing it for years, right? In UA, it's no different to what we know at the moment and I think that's actually a really interesting perspective. I wonder if people new into analytics with GA4 would feel the same. I feel that that's an interesting question because they'd never had that experience using it before right.

[00:15:17] **Usman:** Well, I mean if you have never had a taste of something, I guess you wouldn't really know because you don't have anything to compare to right.

[00:15:24] **Daniel:** Maybe Google just outlasts us.

[00:15:27] **Usman:** Yeah, definitely, like there are a few people I spoke to who started on GA4 in analytics and they kind of liked it, and they kind of liked it, oh, this is nice and this is nice, it's kind of easy and there's a lot you can do in explorations that they haven't had a look at UA so I guess it really helps you in a way, ignorance is bliss after all. So yeah, I think that is, that's helpful. But if someone's coming from something, It's pretty much like I've driven a car and now you have upgraded me to Tesla and I'm comparing it to my old muscle car or something like that. It's human nature, if you've used something similar, there's always that comparison going in the back of your mind, and you can't really help it easily unless that thing is really good to make you forget the good old days, so to speak.

[00:16:11] **Daniel:** That's it yeah, it's all about the kind of the hindsight and the looking back. I do a lot of GA4 training, and the things I ask right at the beginning with a group of people is who's used Universal Analytics before and who's pretty good at Universal Analytics, and I kind of empathise with them and say, look, this is going to be harder for you because you're going to have to unlearn Universal Analytics to be able to learn GA4. Anyone that's coming in fresh to GA4 is going to have a great time, and it's going to be relatively simple because GA4 is a simpler tool than Universal Analytics, there's no doubt about that. It's just we are going in with a very complicated Universal Analytics brain, and you know, we have to learn how to work around so many things. There's a hundred reports in the left navigation, you have to kind of get that out of your head, which is actually a hard thing in itself. So I completely get you, I know those people too, I'm envious of those people, but that's not, that's not me.

[00:16:53] **Usman:** Yeah, same. We need something like eternal sunshine of a spotless mind sort of thing to forget everything about UA, you know?

[00:17:00] **Daniel:** Would you imagine? So we've mentioned a couple of things, but one thing that's still on my list though is still the custom channels or at least editing the default channel grouping and/or, either/or, you know, both of those really having a way to manipulate and adjust and edit the default channel groupings feels like something that's an obvious thing to be able to do and also then to potentially, if we can have custom channel groupings as well. There's one stipulation though I wanted to say with this is I don't just want to see the Universal Analytics feature rolled out with this. What I would love is two improvements to it, and I wouldn't happily wait for this, but I want it this year.

[00:17:35] **Daniel:** One of which is that I want the custom channel groupings to be available in the Data API as well, so that I can use them outside of the platform. And the second one is that they backdate, both of them backdate whenever we make an edit to them, or we have the choice of backdating them so that we can kind of fix things retroactively without having to kind of account for it in roundabout ways in Looker Studio or something like that. So channels, it was on our list last year, it's on my list this year. Hopefully they get round to it but I do want to see those two improvements rather than just copy and pasting what they had before.

[00:18:05] **Usman:** Well, I think I agree with that because when I found out they don't have custom channel grouping I was like really, why? Like it's something kind of basic, but maybe the rationale here is that not a lot of businesses really make use of those custom channel groupings and maybe, I don't know, 5, 10 businesses do them or big enterprises do them, and it's not on the priority list of Google. And I love the fact that you mentioned that you want to see two more improvements, you don't just want copy and paste. And those are important improvements because hey, hey, we are in 2023 now so we would love to see some improvements as well, and those improvements make sense.

[00:18:39] **Usman:** I think in general, if you can do a lot of settings that you can apply and they also apply back to the retroactive data that we have in historical data that we have, that would really, really be super helpful actually, because you make mistakes in the past and this is a way to correct them and it gives you a lot of flexibility and in today's day and age, we love flexibility. I think a lot of people will echo that, that they love flexibility and tools. Giving you flexibility is a tool you'll love forever. So I think that is a very interesting one that we should be able to do that change when we create those custom channel groupings should apply it retroactively to the data as well.

[00:19:17] **Usman:** And second one, yes, why not be able to use it out of the platform? I believe a lot of work arounds are there in the ‘Big G’ I call it, because it's BigQuery, but I call it the Big G because it's like everything is going to that now. So the BigQuery, yes, but who is going to go into another platform? Again, there's a lot of friction here to go there, create and edit, and have your own different definitions of custom channels. That's a lot of work. If they can remove those friction points, I'm sure they can they're really qualified engineers who've been working since years now. It's just that someone needs to go and talk to them about them. I guess you need to have a chat with them Dan.

[00:19:54] **Daniel:** That's it, maybe I should do it. Maybe it's all on me, I haven't told them yet.

[00:19:57] **Usman:** Let's go to Dublin someday, they've got a HQ there.

[00:20:00] **Daniel:** Yeah, exactly. The one thing you mentioned there, which if I had to finish my, kind of like my demand list for the channel grouping, it has to be to export the channels into BigQuery too. So at the moment you get the hit-level source medium campaign combination, but you don't get the actual channels they translate to. So lots of people have created sort of SQL code or recipes, whatever you want to call it, to be able to replicate the same logic, but it's, it's just a nightmare really. It's just a nightmare having to do that ourselves, and then inevitably there's going to be discrepancies, but just export the channel. Come on, like it surely can't be that difficult. Amongst other things that we'd love to have in the BigQuery export, of course, this is obviously just one very narrow slice of what we actually want to see extra.

[00:20:36] **Usman:** I completely agree with that, why not? Again, as you said, there's a lot of why not and I think like this is kind of basic, why don't we have this? But maybe they're still working on it. And I'm really hopeful for 2023 because the past two years I felt like GA4 was on trial and now you're getting into the actual usage so here's to hoping. I really hope we get to see these features because these are important. Cool, important features that are, that give you a love utility it's not like just something there to make it look pretty, it has a very good use case.

[00:21:05] **Daniel:** I wonder if they're going to get these kind of things out before the July 1st deadline for Universal Analytics, or whether this is going to be a when we get to it kind of job. Or whether they have no intention of, we actually have no idea. We can't peek behind the curtain, but it'd be interesting to see the flurry of releases Google Analytics 4 is going to make up until the 1st of July just to say they got to parity, or they did something before they deprecated Universal, even if it is kind of like two days before or something like that. But it'd be really interesting to see the next sort of five, six months worth of releases. In my head, I feel like it's going to be more of a push for them to release a bunch of stuff and then they might slow down a bit once it's been turned off right.

[00:21:41] **Usman:** I feel that way as well, I think they will hopefully release quite a lot of these features. If not these, the, the major ones a lot of people have been talking about, they would be released, but maybe they will come down to it very slowly towards the end of the year or something like that. But once UA is buried away we will still be living with GA4 and whatever it is, I guess we'll have to accept our fate in front of Google Gods. And that being said, I'm glad that there's still more time for UA 360 so you'll still get to kind of like deal with bigger enterprise accounts in a slower pace. So I guess thanks to Google for that maybe they did it because they want to fix GA4 even further, but if they're just going to bring a lot of changes to 360, the overall idea that you provide other features as pay as you go or some sort of subscription. I think I really love that idea actually.

[00:22:29] **Daniel:** I think that, you know, if we were to re kind of invent the kind of monetisation of Google Analytics, it makes kind of sense for it to be a pay as you go modular experience. A lot of SaaS platforms now are, you know, put your credit card in it kinda like the GCP, you put your credit card in and you pay for what you use, right? Like it's exactly the same. Why not even just do it all through the GCP anyway, but put your credit card in and then for example, turn on, I don't know, 10,000 quotas a day or a month. But then, you know, let's say you want to go past the 1 million events, export to BigQuery, then just add a couple of million on top of that on a daily export. I mean they could be really clever here and monetise it in lots of really meaningful ways where a lot of companies that would never have paid for Google Analytics before starting to pay a little bit more and more and more. As well as monetising in the GCP, I think there's a big old gap you know, we don't know the exact amount it depends, is obviously an answer here, but from $0 a month to thousands of dollars a month for the 360 licence, there's a huge spectrum in the middle of people willing to pay hundreds or a thousand dollars a month, or ten dollars a month or whatever it is you know.

[00:23:27] **Daniel:** I think there's people, you know, waving cash and they could be in an opportunity just to kind of start hoovering some of that up. But you know, we aren't responsible for monetising GA, who knows, they'll get there and I think that will piss off probably a big sales partner network that they may be not willing to do very quickly, if at all, you know?

[00:23:44] **Usman:** Yeah, I agree with that. I agree with that, I think that there's a lot of people in between that have been sandwiched, so to speak, and ignored because you're looking at your eye level and if you're only looking at your eye level, that's a problem because there's a lot of people down there who are looking up to you and they're like, hey, take my money I can use this feature. I want to use this feature, I can pay you a bit for that because it eventually helps them. It's really helping people realise analytics is important, they cannot ignore it anymore. They used to, I mean I've seen accounts that were a mess because people use the thing, it's not a big deal anymore. Anyone can set it up and just look at some data and that's what you've done. Oh, look at the number of visitors have gone up and stuff like that but now people realise the power of analytics and data driven, I mean, it's a buzzword, I get it. But data driven decisions actually do make sense if you look at data and that is something that is supporting your thoughts or your business then obviously you care about it.

[00:24:36] **Usman:** So I hope, I really hope they do bring something like that. And if not that, at least bring in the features that were in UA and improve upon them because that is what you would call some sort of, you know, like progressive growth because you keep taking away, it's like my phone does not have 3.5mm jack anymore. I know they see it as tech advancement or whatever, but I have some really good headphones lying around and I can't use them anymore. So yeah, yay for technology. but come on, give me what you already had, don't at least take that away right. So that's the case here with GA4, don't take away what you already gave me, I already have a hard taste of that now.

[00:25:09] **Daniel:** Yeah but the thing is, the next headphones will come with a USB-C dongle right or something like that. I think we're on a transitional period, headphone jacks and Google Analytics, you know, very similar in terms of where we are transitioning from one technology to another, that's the hard part, the transition, the kind of like living in the GA4 world, or the USBC world is actually fine, but moving from onto the other kind of sucks. So there must be something else on the list Usman what else have you got?

[00:25:33] **Usman:** Definitely, definitely. So we've already talked about views and stuff like that so one feature I feel like that is missing is annotations. That is a really powerful feature, especially if you work on an account temporarily or if you're an agency who's working on a big account and then you'll leave today and someone's coming six months down the road, wouldn't know why there is some spike or why there is no traffic or something gone completely different. That is an outlier and you have an annotation saying, oh, we did something like this today or we launched or changed our SEO strategy or something like that. Currently, there's no way to know that in GA4, I'm surprised it isn't there because it's a very basic thing.

[00:26:10] **Usman:** In fact, if anything they could be more visualised, more improved because in UA they were kind of like really, really tucked down under. And if you were someone who didn't use Universal Analytics too much, you wouldn't know there are annotations there. But what they could do is what I would love to see if you hover over a graph and it pops up, those annotations itself, kind of like, you know, I don't know how to visualise this.

[00:26:33] **Daniel:** We could even look to some of the other stuff that Google's already done. So in Google Search Console, for example, they have like their own, not annotations that we can do ourself, but there's annotations in there of when they've changed like the algorithm or things have changed and they've got that built into the visualisations in search console. So why not even just do automatic annotations to start with, you know, like the search console updates, anything like that. You know, anything to do with, basically plug it into the Google Ad Network right, and just put stuff in there. I mean, they've done this before, they can do it again and just why not right?

[00:27:05] **Usman:** Yeah, exactly and I love the fact that you mentioned ads as well, because ads have a lot of effect on like the traffic that is coming in or if you're an e-commerce business and you're doing any sales season like Black Friday or Cyber Monday and stuff like that. So those automated annotations would be awesome because you look at it and it gives you a context right away because X, Y, Z stuff happened when ads were running from your Google Ads account or SEO. We had new algorithm launch or something like that. It gives you context instantly, you don't have to think about it in. In fact, if you have a business and you select your industry there, normally in your Google Analytics account, it could even give you those annotations. Like if it's a beach wear business, in summers you have a lot of sales. So there's an automated annotations, it's your peak season because you sell beach wear, right? So in winters there's a downward trend because people are not going to be buying beach wear stuff.

[00:28:01] **Usman:** So those automated annotations, because you already select industries and there are thousand and thousand of data that is coming into Google, they can use that and basically give you these automated annotations. And obviously you can always add those manual ones, and when you hover over a graph, it gives you those a nice, you know, pointy eye arrows and tells you, oh, this is happening here, this is happening there. So you know what's happening, it's an instant way of giving a very rich context to your data and data block context is just me talking about a lot of money, I can say I have a hundred thousand. What currency? You wouldn't know, right? So the sign you put with the currency sign symbol that you put, that gives it context, right? A hundred thousand dollars. Sure, why not? But if I say a hundred thousand Zimbabwean dollars, that's not a lot of money, right? So the context is super important here, and I think that would be really, really helpful to even someone who is new to analytics and maybe they're not very technical, they just want to look at the account and get some insights and that is what annotations can do, annotations are super powerful.

[00:29:02] **Daniel:** I couldn't agree more, there is a hacky workaround at the moment. There's two ways I've seen with a Chrome extension and the other one is Looker Studio using a Google sheet to keep the annotations. I'll try and find those and dig those out and link off to it in the show notes so anyone listening can have a go at those, at least temporarily until they hear us and they cave to our demands.

[00:29:19] **Usman:** Yeah, the Chrome one is pretty cool actually. I've used it as well, that's what I'm thinking like if you already have it, as you said, if you already have it in search console, you already have the concept, you have built something on it. At this point, you just need to kind of transfer it over, we just change a few things, bits in bobs, and optimise it for GA for that matter. It's not like a very novel concept. If there's a Google Chrome extension, I'm pretty sure Google can do better than that.

[00:29:44] **Daniel:** Yeah, well I think we're making one huge assumption there, and that is that the Google Analytics team speak to the search console team here. And I think that is a big assumption, maybe they don't even know that exists. I think they're such a big company and having dabbled with them working with Google over the years I wouldn't put money on the fact that they know that exists right now.

[00:30:00] **Daniel:** Well let's move on, and there's one point I really wanted to get off my chest here, and that is the current need to set up custom dimensions for standard field that are collected automatically. So what I mean there is within the automatically collected events, like the enhanced measurement events that we get, things like the YouTube video engagements, or more recently, the form fills, the form completions, form submissions, that these are all very interesting and valuable events to be tracking and we get the events automatically, but there's a lot of context with those events. There's a lot of event parameters to be collected automatically as well that we just can't use in this, in the default reports.

[00:30:35] **Daniel:** For example, I happen to have my demand list full here, but especially with form submissions, we don't have the form name or the form ID with the YouTube video. We don't have even the video title, these aren't automatically available to us to use. And so what we're having to use is we're having to use some of our allowance to set up custom dimensions for YouTube video titles and form IDs and form names, just so that I can pull them into my standard reports and it's something that's kind of so silly because if it's being collected automatically and you can use these, by the way, in the explorations they're available for us to use in the explorations, it's just the default reports they're not. Just have them in the default reports as well, so that one, I can use them in any report, and two, I can use them in the API if I'm building a Looker Studio dashboard, I want have that data there, which without doing this step it feels like such an obvious win for them. Just any automatically collected event have the parameters as standard fields.

[00:31:28] **Usman:** Oh yeah, I agree. When I was using GA4, very new to it, and I'm like, these events are being tracked automatically, so I should be able to see them and I couldn't see them. And I was a bit surprised, to be honest, like, why is it not here? And as you said, oh, it's available in exploration but it's not available in the standard reports. And I feel like maybe some internal teams are not talking to each other because like you said Google is a big, big company, because I've created this stuff and it's available here, but hey, I haven't told the other person and they haven't included in the standard reports.

[00:31:57] **Usman:** So I think that makes sense as well. It again saves us or a quota that we have. Again, it's a limited quota. Even if it's 50 custom dimensions, you never know, you would need them for something else later on down the road, because it's not like I'll be switching or people will be switching from GA4 in the next 5, 10 years. You don't get these updates for years, so it takes over my quota, and secondly, I have to again, go and set it up. Why do I need to do that? As you said, it's something silly. As a CRO agency, it's something that is very important for us is Google Optimize and or other testing platforms. So you do get those events sent to you, but to see them, you need to add custom dimensions first and then wait for them to come in. So why is there a need to do that? And if Google Optimize is Google's product, then it doesn't make sense at all that you have to actually go on and even after linking and doing everything you need to create custom dimensions.

[00:32:48] **Usman:** So, I agree with that, and that is on my list as well. Why do we need to do that with custom dimensions? Why there is so much work there, but I feel like this is a feature they might still be improving upon or like it's still a work in progress. Well, a lot of GA4 is a work in progress to me, it often feels buggy when you're using it so you can tell it. So, I think that is something that would come down in the future and maybe much, much sooner than July the 4th. Is it July the 4th? Oh no, it's July 1st, that's when there's sunsetting. So yeah, I completely agree with you on that one, we need that, please give us.

[00:33:25] **Daniel:** Well look, I'm sure that's not an exhaustive list. I could potentially go for hours and just talk about all the kind of small quality of life improvements too. One thing I wanted to end us up on, and that is something that was on last year's episode as well, probably one of the things that comes up the most often when I'm doing training courses, and that is being able to use things like regex or starts with or ends with and just use all the variations of includes, does not include, does not style with regex, include regex, exclude everywhere you can. So when we are creating custom events in the event creation tool, when we're using report filters, when we're doing comparisons in the search table, when we're doing reports, that is the biggest no-brainer out of all this. Doing regex matching and begins with, and ends with and does not begin with, feels like sort of the first, very first step in creating filters, and yet you can't filter exactly how you want to it just feels pretty insane.

[00:34:12] **Usman:** It's so powerful because I don't have to do filtering multiple times, that's why we have regex. I completely agree with that. Again, it seems like we agree quite a lot by the way, Dan. So It is again something very basic and I've been doing it, you've been doing it, a lot of people have been doing it in analytics. Some people who use GTM, they also use it quite a bit. It's powerful, it saves you time and if you're going into optimisation of a tool, why not have it? I've only been able to use a little bit of it in filters, just very basic, you know, for this or this, not ends with, not contains or stuff like that in regex too much.

[00:34:51] **Usman:** So I feel like this would be super, super helpful again. I love the fact that there's so much I think we should have an episode as well where we talk about maybe features that we love a lot.

[00:35:00] **Daniel:** Yeah, yeah, for sure.

[00:35:02] **Usman:** Today we're haters, right? Today we're haters, or moaners so to speak. So I would say regex is super, super helpful and it really saves a lot of time, even if it's the basic one. You don't have to have too advance knowledge of it, you can use regex to drill down very easy and quickly if you have a lot of data. You don't have to do a lot of, you know, like clean up if you can use regex, and that is something I really love about UA to be honest, regex makes my life easy, very easy.

Wind down

[00:35:31] **Daniel:** And I think a lot of other people's too. Usman, it's been great having you on the podcast, thank you so much for joining us. And yes next time you come on, it will just be two ChatGPT engines, there'll be no other hosts on the podcast, it'll just be you talking to some bots. I'll get that set up for next time. But one last question before we end, Usman. If people want to find you, where can people find you? Do you have any social medias that you're active on? How can people find you?

[00:35:53] **Usman:** Again, thanks for having me. I'm really glad we had this chat about, and you were moaning about GA4 quite a bit. If people want to connect with me, LinkedIn is the best place and Usman Qureshi and you should be able to find me, that's my username there.

[00:36:06] **Daniel:** Last question, Usman. I know I said the last one was the last question, but I promise this is the last one. What do you do to wind down? What do you do to escape from the world of analytics?

[00:36:12] **Usman:** I've recently got a PS5, I'm trying to play God of War. I've always been a fan of gaming, but never really got into it too much. And again, I think life is about having resources, just not enough time. So now I'm fighting with time to give me some time of that slice so that I can play games. And then obviously there is Netflix, Disney Plus and a tonne of subscriptions that you just browse through all the time and don't watch a lot of content, that's what I do.

[00:36:38] **Daniel:** Well it's definitely an escape route for sure, and you can definitely get lost in there and good luck with the PS5, I'm a gamer and I love it.

Outro

[00:36:44] **Dara:** That's it for this week to hear more from me and Dan on GA4 and other analytics related topics, all our previous episodes are available in our archive at [measurelab.co.uk/podcast](https://www.measurelab.co.uk/podcast/?utm_medium=podcast&utm_source=transcript&utm_campaign=67), or you can simply use whatever app you're using right now to listen to this, to go back and listen to previous episodes.

[00:37:03] **Daniel:** And if you want to suggest a topic for something me and Dara should be talking about, or if you want to suggest a guest who we should be talking to, there's a [Google Form](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeMwfzg9TdNKeZYRxHci_y0D9up4EyAL5zNMYZNE9P_82fz3Q/viewform) in the show notes that you can fill out and leave us a note. Or alternatively, you can just email us at [podcast@measurelab.co.uk](mailto:podcast@measurelab.co.uk) to get in touch with us both directly.

[00:37:19] **Dara:** Our theme is from Confidential, you can find a link to their music in the show notes. So on behalf of Dan and I, thanks for listening, see you next time.