Episode 20

Unlocking the Power of Google
Analytics with Amanda Webb

Janice Hostager: 0:02
I'm Janice Hostager. After three decades in the marketing business and many years of being the
entrepreneur, I've learned a thing or two about marketing. Join me as we talk about marketing,
small business and life in between. Welcome to My Weekly Marketing.

Janice Hostager: 00:29
Do you check your Google Analytics on the regular? If the answer is no, you're not alone. No
worries For my agency clients. I check every month, but I have worked with several small
business owners who don't check it ever. I know it's not because they don't think it's important,
but often it gets pushed to the back burner when other things are just more pressing. Truth is, it
is important. The numbers tell a story of what's working in your marketing, and especially in your
website, and what isn't. So my first advice is to put a note on your calendar to check your
analytics each and every month. After all, we can't fix what we don't measure. Right?

Now, as many of you know, Google Analytics just updated its platform in a big way. They moved
from Universal Analytics to a new Google Analytics 4 or GA4. That brought about big changes.
So if you didn't know this happened let's say you don't have analytics installed on your website
or you didn't see the emails then it would have updated automatically on July 1st 2023. Because
of this, I wanted to bring on a Google Analytics expert, so I reached out to Amanda Webb.
Amanda and I first met at a conference in San Diego several months ago and she impressed
me with her ability to break down something as complex as GA4 and explain it simply.

Amanda is a brilliant and seasoned Google Analytics expert. She has a remarkable track record
of helping businesses of all sizes figure out the power of data to drive growth. Her content has
won awards nationally and internationally, and she just loves to talk marketing.

So join us as we unravel GA4, demystify some of the complexities of your website's data and
gain new insights from Amanda's wealth of experience.

Here's Amanda.

Well, hey, Amanda, how are you today, hi?

Amanda Webb: 2:20
I'm good, I'm good. It's a little bit cloudy and cooler in Ireland and I believe it is where you are, so I've hopefully got better weather, maybe.

Janice Hostager: 2:32
You maybe did. I mean, it's been over 100 degrees here in Austin for a long time, so I'm kind of ready for, you know, a rainy day. Our grass is kind of crunchy, which is sad, but it is the nature of the beast, but I still prefer it to 50 below zero, where we still live in Minnesota. So, anyway, yeah.

So tell us a little bit about your story, because we met at Social Media Marketing World several months ago and you were talking about Google Analytics and I love that. You are an expert in that, so tell us how you got there. So what's your story? How did you arrive at being a Google Analytics expert?

Amanda Webb: 3:17
I started in digital marketing about. I think this particular business is 14 years old this year, actually coming up to its birthday really soon and prior to that I had a company selling corporate gifts. But then the global recession happened. Nobody was buying corporate gifts and that was a big relief to me because I really loved at the time social media marketing. That's what I did. Facebook was kind of new and exciting back then and that's when I started my business and I was so in love with marketing, with digital marketing, so I soon expanded out of social media and started doing all the things. So I had a blog that I updated three times a week and I won awards for that. So obviously I was putting a lot of time into that. I had a YouTube channel where I was putting up videos once a week. I had a podcast that was podcasting once a week. I was posting on all the social media. I had an email list. I had a live show and I was still managing to do client work and drive around the country training people. But of course I loved that. I mean, I was probably still a bit of a workaholic, but I loved that.

But the problem was I was doing all this activity and when I started looking at it, I realized that actually maybe all this time I was spending on it was wasted, and I think that's a worry for a lot of businesses. So I think a lot of people think the home on social media is wasted. And it was a bigger problem as well, because I didn't really have time for life outside all that stuff I was doing. I wasn't getting a good night's sleep. I wasn't sleeping many hours, I was working weekends, I was working late nights. My relationship wasn't great because I was spending so much time working. I didn't really have time to like, talk to or engage, and I was very snappy. All I cared about was work. So that, alongside the worry that all the things I was doing weren't possibly bringing in business, that's when I started looking at my analytics in more depth and properly, because before that, I'd been obsessed by how many people visited my blog or my website. I'd been obsessed when I launched a new one, how many people could get in there. I was obsessed with all the wrong things because, of course, none of those things were bringing me sales. I was doing SEO just to get traffic to my website, without any end goal in mind. So, instead of just looking at my analytics, I started decoding them to find out what was important. And that was really the point I went. I need more sleep, I need time off, I need to hone what I'm

doing. So let's look at what's working and what's not, and I know loads of businesses have that problem as well.

So the first thing I found out was that, yes, I was getting all this blog traffic, but it wasn't. It was irrelevant. It wasn't people who wanted to buy from me. People weren't signing up for a lead magnet or making inquiries or looking at my service pages. They were just coming to the blog posts and leaving, which wasn't doing my business any good at all. So the first thing I did was I was an award winning blogger, but I stopped blogging because that wasn't working, or in the form that I was doing it then it wasn't working. I realized I needed to be more strategic. I also stopped doing it. Well, I didn't stop doing all the social media, but I decided to focus on one thing at a time, and I've gone through a few iterations and finally found that the thing that really works for me is LinkedIn.

So now I spend more of my time on LinkedIn and I really work hard on making that work for me, for getting sales from it, so I freed up an awful lot of time. I now sleep eight hours. I'm in bed eight hours a night. No negotiation on that. That is me at least eight hours a night. I now have hobbies, so I knit. I also just got married, so my relationships got better. I don't work weekends on very rare occasions. So it really has changed my life and I think that's from my perspective. I want to give businesses one to get rid of that doubt, that worry that what they're doing isn't working. And secondly, maybe to get a bit more free time, more time to pursue things outside their business and actually have a life as well.

Janice Hostager: 7:26
Oh yeah, I mean, I think what you're saying too, is something that I've had a business coach say to me. You either get the results you wanted or the lesson you needed, and you know, and sometimes those lessons are hard, but I love that you use your analytics to figure out the answers. So many business owners that I've worked with don't really know what to do with their Google Analytics data, so they know that it's you know. They'll have somebody design their website, for example, and their web person will set it up for them, but tell us what valuable data that analytics will offer a small business owner.

Amanda Webb: 8:07
It really depends on the questions that you ask. You need to know what it is you want your analytics to ask you. So some examples from clients that I've worked with is Instagram. People love Instagram. It's like their favorite social network. A lot of people enjoy it in a way that I don't, because I don't very often post on Instagram anymore. But again, that worry is there that all this activity on Instagram is leading to sales. So some of that they can work out through Instagram itself, because people will send them direct messages. But are people actually visiting the website and are the people who visit the website converting? So you can actually set yourself up. You can either just look at a standard report and do a little bit of tweaking to see what's going on, or you can create your own report in Google Analytics that will tell you what traffic is coming from Instagram whether it's coming from your stories, whether it's coming from your posts and track that through to see if they're turning into sales or turning into people making inquiries. If you're service-based, there's a few things you need to do to make that happen. So

you'll need to use UTM tracking, which is one of those things that I know, I say and everyone's like. That sounds horribly scary, but actually it's a really simple thing to do. You need to do that and you need to just slightly customize one of the Google Analytics reports and you've got that information in front of you, and that means that you can see what happens. If you try some new things on Instagram, does that get you more conversions from Instagram, or if you stop doing Instagram altogether, will the conversions die off? Well, obviously, if you're being successful, yes. So twice recently I've worked with clients who've had that question and we've identified that Instagram is actually working really well for them, and I think that's important, because we often think that Instagram is just fun, right, we think it's the fluffy network. So that's one example.

Another example was a client I had that was blogging and they wanted to know, you know, is the time I spend on my blog worthwhile? So we were able to see the landing pages people arrive at and, if they went to, we were able to set up an exploration to see where they went to next or where people came to a particular service page. If we could track them back, had they read the blog as well and good news for her as well. And I think this is important because often we don't want to look at our analytics in case it tells us things we don't want to know. Good news for her: her blogging was driving traffic to a sales page and driving inquiries.

Third example wasn't so good news. I was working with a business who had four services that they were selling and by delving into all their data we were able to find out that the conversion rate so the number of people who visited one of those service pages to the number of people who actually made an inquiry on one of those core service pages was really low. So it was high, really high on one, but really low on this last one. So then we were able to go and look at that services page, look at the copy on that page, look at the images. Was there a video on there? Was there testimony on there and see why it was that people might not be converting, make some changes and increase that conversion rate. So it wasn't good news to start with, but we were able to act on it.

Janice Hostager: 11:26
Yeah, and this is what I tell my clients too is that the numbers tell the story. And if you don't look at the numbers, I am better now, but I definitely have been guilty of that too, and I think you're right, people don't want to know. Well, we get busy too. We think we know what's working, what's not working, but until you really look at the numbers, you don't know, and sometimes it can really surprise you. Yeah, and especially with social media, I think it's so easy to get caught up in those vanity metrics, the likes, the followers and all of that, but that's not really necessarily going to move the needle for your company. It's website visits or sales.

Amanda Webb: 12:06
You need all of that. I always think that people think followers aren't important. It is important, but one thing you can look at a really simple calculation you can get is if you get more followers on Instagram, do you make more sales? So, even without looking at the deep data, it's like if you get 1000 new followers, are you getting any more sales? If not, then maybe the followers are worthwhile in the first place. Maybe you need to look somewhere else. So, yeah, you're so right.

Janice Hostager: 12:30
The wrong followers, right, right. So right now we're recording this mid July 2023. And Google Analytics 4 was just pushed out. We had lots and lots of warnings that this was coming. Everybody prior to this had Universal Analytics, and Google Analytics 4 is a little bit different. So, kind of on a fifth grade level, explain What are the advantages to Google Analytics 4, ga4 over Universal Analytics?

Amanda Webb: 13:05
no-transcript. So I think there's two reasons that Google has done this.

Firstly, Universal Analytics was built on an old system. Google once upon a time bought this thing I think it was called Urchin Analytics, which is where the UA for universal comes from, even though I just said it's Urchin. Also, the U in UTM comes to Merchin. So they bought this tool and, a bit like Facebook, they just kept building on top of that tool until it got really complicated and that just meant that when I mean it's an interface you're used to, but there was a lot to it. There were so many different menus and submenus and places to go to do things. It was just all these bits bolted on. So, even though it's had an upgrade before, each upgrade was just kind of adding stuff in or making it look prettier, whereas Google Analytics 4 is a brand new system. They built it from the ground up and that makes a lot more sense because they have it under control. I mean, you know the way there's so many bugs on Facebook now that's just because there's so many bits being bolted on is because there's been so many changes this way that it can be a lot cleaner and they can see the bugs as they appear because it's all new and shiny. So that's the first reason.

The second reason is because it works for the internet in 2023. We know people are getting very cautious about their privacy online. Here in the EU we have GDPR, which means, basically, they don't want you collecting data on people. So they were having Google, were having issues with some EU governments that said, no, universal Analytics is not privacy-centric, it's not GDPR compliant, and that meant it was going to be banned in some countries or they were threatening to ban it. It hadn't actually happened yet, so that was going to be an issue as well, because you could see things like IP addresses. You could see way more info than you should. You were able to personally identify people, which is the whole thing. Gdpr. What doesn't? What you're doing through that? So that's GDPR. I know there's a law in California and I know there's lots of other laws coming in similar to GDPR to protect our privacy. This is privacy-centric, so it doesn't show you IP addresses, it doesn't show you personalized information, and the only time that you can start getting your demographics is once it's gathered enough data that it's confident that that data will be anonymous. So that's the other reason they've done it. So that means everything is different. It's a completely different system.

So, to answer your question, the biggest thing that's changed is you used to go in and you used to see a page view. You'd be able to see how many people had viewed your website, and that was each individual page on your website and that was great. But if somebody went and visited one single page on your website, watched a video on that page, scrolled all the way to the

bottom, spent 10 minutes maybe reading it in depth, clicked a link to a third-party site, that was considered a bounce. And when you all thought a bounce was a really bad thing, we would all look at a bounce rate and, particularly if you were blogging, you'd cry because it was so high. Now we don't measure by page view. We measure by events. An event is a page view, is just one event. Other events can be a video view. It can be people scrolling through your website. It can be people spending an amount of time on your website. So all of a sudden, that irrelevant visitor, the one that was considered a bounce is suddenly an engaged visitor. We can see that people are engaging with their website, which is a marker of success. So I'm a big enthusiast of that. That's the first thing. Something else that's changed is do you remember goals in Universal Analytics? If you got into it at all, one of the first things you would have done is set goals, and these are things you want people to do on your website. So for a product business that's buying something, that's a purchase. For a service-based business that could be filling in your contact form or filling in a quotation form or downloading a lead magnet, they're not called goals anymore. They're now called conversions and they're based on an event. So an event is somebody visiting a page. So if you've got a thank you page for people filling in your contact form, you can make a special event when people visit that specific webpage. That is a conversion, whereas it would have been a goal before. So that's a big change as well, and it looks really intimidating when you start, but actually, when you kind of like find your way through it, it's actually quite straightforward to set up and probably, I think, because I've been working on this for over a year now, I think it's a better system. I know a lot of people are still finding it frustrating. That's just two. There's so many different things. The language has completely changed. It's gonna take you a little while to get your head around, but it really is worth it when you do.

Janice Hostager: 18:01
That is good. I have played with it a bit too, and I found that it is like you said, once you wrap your mind around the fact that it is going to be different, it just I kind of had to erase the old analytics from my brain and just say, okay, this is a new thing, and just learn it from scratch. And it does seem very workable, not as intimidating. So what are some simple things that you feel like every business owner should do now that they have GAF4? Now, you mentioned conversions, or what we call goals. I tend to tell my clients to do that right away for any lead magnet they have on their page. What are some other things that I know there's a great deal of customization that you can do on it. Or at least when you're switching over, they ask you a lot of questions. Do you want to try this? Did you look at this and kind of lead you through a little bit? But I find Google a little bit clunky when it comes to trying to explain things and sometimes you just have to jump in and try it. But what are some things that you think that most business owners should be doing on GAF4 to kind of customize it for them?

Amanda Webb: 19:15
So you can customize any report on your left hand side when you log in. Actually, this has recently changed. What's dependent when you switch over to Google Analytics is what you see on your left hand side, just to make life complicated for all of us who thought when you were going on. But you have on the left hand side a number of menus and I don't want to say what's under each menu now because they've just added in this whole new menu item for new users.

But if you go into each of those you can see reports that do different things. So, for example, you've got two traffic reports or acquisition reports. You've got a user acquisition report that, if Google is able to identify the same person coming back to your website over and over again, it can tell you when they first came to your website, the first page they looked at, which is really useful and collate all that data together. And you also have a traffic acquisition report which can tell you where people came from for that session, that time that they visited your website. So that's a little bit confusing when you first see that you've got those two. Now I tend to think it really depends on your business. I tend to really rely on the traffic acquisition report. Just because a lot of people I'm in Europe, most of my website visitors are in Europe no, a lot of people they won't be able to collect that data on. So when I'm there, that's the first thing I'm interested in: where did my customers come from? And that's the first thing that's going to confuse you or baffle you. Because when you go in there, where you used to be able to see things like referral, social, whatever, they've added this new section that they're calling default channel grouping. So it does kind of bring in the same that you had before. It brings in like referrals and it will bring in social and it will bring in paid search and search, but it doesn't necessarily gel with what you used to have before.

Amanda Webb: 21:11
So the first thing you can do is actually change that to something that makes sense for you. At the top of that first column that says default channel grouping, there's a little arrow. If you click on that you can choose, for example, medium, which a lot of us would have used before, and it will show you the old stuff, it will show you social, it will show you referral, it will show you whatever else used to be under that. Again, I haven't used Universal Analytics because I was banning myself from using it. I don't remember what used to be there, but it's all there. Under medium, you can also select a source, which will tell you the exact website that people are coming from. And if you are using your UTMs, you can select a campaign, which is really handy for saying you know which Facebook group you posted to, maybe, or which email you sent out is sending people to your site. So that's still there. It's just hidden under this new thing that they've decided they want to put there. And you know the default channel. Grouping isn't a bad thing because you can't customize it, and my theory is that they've added this here because and I know I'm talking about UTMs too much, so sorry if it's a little bit technical, because we all make really bad UTMs. So basically, google designed UTMs so that you would slot it. Would slot into their defined mediums of social and referral and paid and email, but what we end up doing is just writing whatever we want in our little UTM parameters and it all got messed up. So I think the reason they've got this here is you can't change it, it's. It's telling you what social traffic. You can't define it yourself with that default channel grouping. So change that around, play with that, and it will tell you a lot more about where your traffic is coming from.

Amanda Webb: 22:57
The other thing you can do there and these are just really simple edits is if you chose, for example, the source, you'll see if it's like Instagram, you'll have like m.instagram and you'll have Instagram. Maybe you've got a link in bio tool and so it will say you know, link tree instead of Instagram. You can actually filter that down to show you just the Instagram referral traffic, and there's two ways you could do that. You can. There's a little box above the default channel

grouping, a little search box. You can just type Instagram into that and it will bring in the versions of Instagram that use the word Instagram and it will just filter your whole report down to that so you're able to see instantly your Instagram results. That doesn't address the link tree problem, though, right. So that's when you have to get a little bit further with your customization. At the top right hand side you'll see there's a little pencil on each report. If you don't have that, that just means you don't have admin access. So you'll need to get extra and you can actually go in and you can go into the filter there and you can say I only want the source that includes, and it will give you a big list of all the sources that it's found and you can tick the ones that are important to you. So Instagram, link tree, whatever. And then when you save that it will bring, it will just customize that report so you only see those things. So that's a really cool thing. You can do so much more complicated, I know, than in Universal Analytics when it used to just say Instagram, facebook, Twitter, whatever it used to say. But you have more control here and I think that's it you are making Google Analytics 4 show you what you want it to show you.

Janice Hostager: 24:38
That's going to be good in the long run, for sure.

Amanda Webb: 24:41
I feel like I needed to show you the screen when I was talking about that, but you find it.

Janice Hostager: 24:47
It is. That is the challenge of a podcast, right. Yeah so let's talk about UTM. So UTMs are a little addition that you add to the back of your URL If you are sending traffic. You were setting up a URL to send traffic you can explain better than I can probably to another source so that you can track that link. So if you were running an ad, for example, you would set up your UTM parameters specific to that ad so you can track the people that click that ad versus a different ad. Is that a simplified way of doing it? Ok, so I didn't realize that Google had standardized these ever so. Is that something now that we should stick to? Should we do it differently? Should we do UTM differently, or?

Amanda Webb: 25:38
Well, I think under Google Analytics 4, it's actually more forgiving of us not using the standard. So in the past, if you didn't put social as your medium, it wouldn't end up in your social report in Universal Analytics, it would just get flipped somewhere else. And that was the problem. If you didn't get it right, it would put it in the wrong report, whereas because they've got these default channel groupings, it matters less. So before you always had to have the medium, it had to be social, with a small amount. It's amazing how many actual tools that use UTMs actually don't get this right. So if you haven't got it right in the past, don't worry. Like all the big boys, like the big social media scheduling tools, don't get this right, so don't worry about it. So now you can actually, if you get it wrong, it doesn't matter, it's still going to show up in the report, as long as you know what you're searching for and that's where that little search bar comes in. You can type in maybe you didn't use social or referral. Maybe one of the things I do is speaking engagement is one of my mediums, for example. So I can just type that in and it will bring up my whole list of speaking engagement referrals that I've got from my website. So I actually think it's

more forgiving now in Google Analytics for you. You don't have to worry too much. Just in my heart I always want to keep it to the standard because it's been drummed into me that that's what I need to do. But you can worry about that a lot less.

Amanda Webb: 27:09
Right, right. So do you feel like once you get it set up, it's going to be easier for everybody? Once you get past the initial, like what is this and how do I use it, and get it customized for your own business, Then it's going to be a whole lot easier to use, right?

Amanda Webb: 27:25
Yeah, you're going to be able to just click into the reports that you've created that are important to you and see the data that you need straight away. And I think the nice thing is, this has been around for a few years before they forced it on you. So when I started using this, like about a year and a half ago, when I went full time into it, there was actually like no data at all out there Sorry, my alarm went off. So there was no data, there was no info out there. I basically had to go and find out for myself. There was some training, but it was very loose. So now, a few years in and a year and a half afterwards, there's a lot of online trainers, a lot of YouTube videos, there's a lot of blog posts that can help you get through this. So I would say, set aside some time and just the big thing you want to do is work out what you want it to tell you. So, is my marketing working is a question. I get a whole lot of time, so then you need to break it down. Well, what marketing activities am I doing? So it might be you write down your social channels or your email marketing. Maybe you're doing like flyer drops as well and you've got a QR code that people scan on the flyer drop. You want to write down all of those and then look at how you could measure the activity from those through Google Analytics. And once you start with a question that you want to answer, it takes away the overwhelm of oh, there are all these things, what is it I need to look at?

Janice Hostager: 28:53
Love that idea. How often do you recommend people check their analytics?

Amanda Webb: 29:01
So I'm obsessed. I look at least every day. But that's more about me. I'm still learning how to do things because it's still changing, like I said, but you don't need to look every day. I would say I do an in-depth report once a month. I've got specific metrics that I've chosen to measure and that's about things like audience growth. It's about how many conversions I get, which lead magnets are converting things along those lines, and it also includes my social analytics and the stuff that happens offline. So that's kind of a big job. Takes me a couple of hours once a month. But in general it depends what you're doing right now. If you've got a new project, a big project that you're promoting, you want to know regularly how that's doing. You want to look every day to see how that's doing, because it's a brand new thing that you're running. If you're launching something, that's going to be important. But if you've just got your business ticking over once a week or once a fortnight or even leaving it to that once a month, it's probably fine. But again, if you've got a brand new website, you're going to want to look daily to see what's happening. It all depends on what you're doing right now, what marketing activities are you taking.

Janice Hostager: 30:07
That makes sense. Now you have videos as well, right, and I know I've watched a few of them on YouTube, and you do a great job of explaining everything too, so much better than some. I'm not throwing anybody under the bus here, but there are some, like I said, some Google videos out there that I think I just kind of passed on by because they did not. I think they confused me more than yeah. So where can people find you and learn more about you?

Amanda Webb: 30:38
So my website is spiderworking com and if you go there on the homepage, at the bottom of the homepage, I have a Google Analytics poor phrase book that will help you understand the language. So whenever you come across something like default channel grouping and wonder what it is, you can refer to that. So that's one thing you can do and that will join you on to my email list as well, which will tell you Different services and also give you daily Inspiration, like I am not trying to sell to you every day, but I'm trying to say look, this is, this is something that you can do, or have you considered Looking at your business like this, or how do you do this? I like to have something that's going to make you think. Very short emails every day you get from me. Or the best place to follow me is on LinkedIn, as I mentioned earlier on. So If you can find me on LinkedIn I'm Amanda Webb. I'm connected to Janice, so you should be able to find her as a mutual connection or Facebook, which was my, as I said, my early days. That was my first social network and I still don't have the love for it that I used to for reasons, but I can't seem to ease myself off it. So that's a good place to find me. My business page is Amanda Webb spider-working and I'm Amanda Webb. I look a bit like this, but with orange hair because it's washed out a little bit more. You'll find me. I've got a hat in my profile picture. So, yeah, connect with me in any of those places. I mean, you'll find me at spider-working, on Instagram, on Twitter and not on threads, because we don't have it in the EU yet but almost everywhere else. So feel free to connect with me or message me on any of those. I do monitor them, even if I'm not posting on them.

Janice Hostager: 32:18
Okay, good to know. I'll have all the links to in the show notes so anybody that wants to get information about you and have them help you with, do you. Do you help companies with their setup as well? Getting this all, yes.

Amanda Webb: 32:32
So and it's a lot of what I'm doing right now I have like a bit in this course. So, if you're, if you like, self-paced learning, I have a very short beginners course. It's nice little short videos that take you through each thing that you need to do, and I also then have a group training program and one-to-one training and then a larger consulting program. So, whatever level you're at, if you're not sure which one is suited to you, you can just drop me an email or drop me a message and we can talk through it. But the one-to-one training is what a lot of people are going for now because, like you said, the Google documentation Is almost like it's in a foreign language. It's very complex. So my job is really to help you one-to-one work through creating those reports, setting up that report so you can see what you need to see every time you log in.

Janice Hostager: 33:21
Honestly, Amanda, you explained this better than anybody I've ever met, so I appreciate you being on here today, and I know my listeners will too, so thank you so much, amanda. I love chatting with you and, like I said, I appreciate all I've learned today, and I've learned a lot.

Amanda Webb: 33:38
Thanks for having me.It's been great to chat with you.

Amanda Webb: 33:42
Oh, my goodness, did you learn as much as I did today? I hope you can use this information to customize your own analytics reports, which will ultimately increase your ROI and improve your marketing. To learn more about anything we talked about today, including Amanda's website and free Google analytics for phrase book and cheat sheet, visit our show notes at my weekly marketing comm board, slash 20. Thanks so much for joining us today. We'll see you next time. Bye for now.