A Handbook For Arts Managers: How Google Analytics Can Help Solve Operational Challenges

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Arts organizations of today face a host of challenges, ranging from traditional issues like budgetary constraints and limited staff to more recent concerns, such as shifting patron demographics and increased marketing disruption caused by social media frenzy. Navigating through these challenges while still meeting operating goals puts heavy pressure on arts managers to ensure they are using their resources as efficiently as possible. Luckily, there are tools available in the form of new technologies that can help organizations study the challenges they are facing. These powerful tools can provide arts organizations clarity for solving strategic questions, and give them the ability to make data-driven decisions. Arts organizations are no strangers to certain technologies, as statistics from the Pew Research Center show that 99% of arts organizations have their own website and 97% have a presence on at least one social media platform, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr in order to keep up with the competitors in this changing operational landscape. Even though these findings by the Pew Research Center seem encouraging, only 63% of these same respondents stated that they believed digital technology is “very important” for helping them use their organization’s resources more efficiently, signaling a gap between having basic technological frameworks in place and the value arts organizations feel they actually derive from them (Kristin Thomson 2013).

Many of the respondents said that cost and capacity issues were the biggest constraints when attempting to adopt new digital technologies. Many arts organizations feel they simply don’t have the time or money to spend on the implementation and training processes that come along with new platforms, especially when the world of technology changes so quickly. However, what many organizations fail to realize is that many digital options are available to them that go beyond websites and social media, such as Google Analytics, and at minimal direct expense. If your organization doesn’t have Google Analytics yet, simply fill out the Google for Nonprofit registration form to get started.

The following report provides a toolkit for arts managers to use by delving into the opportunities available for data-informed decision-making using Google Analytics. To demonstrate opportunities for data-informed decision-making, I researched various industry reports and received feedback from professionals working in the arts management field. There were some clear common themes of operational issues that impact many organizations. These sources created a framework that outlined three important challenges facing field:

![Figure 1: Three Challenges](image-url)
What many organizations fail to realize is that by just by having their website, they have the ability to uncover answers to important questions related to the challenges above thanks to the data collected about their website users. Google Analytics, a powerful tool that analyzes website data, has the ability to be an arts manager’s best friend. It is primarily considered a tool to monitor website traffic and gain marketing insights such as site referral sources, page design efficacy, and page popularity. In fact, in 2014, Arts Management and Technology Laboratory contributor Kristen Sorek West’s report *From Strategy to Analysis: A Guide to Navigating Google Analytics* detailed how an arts organization might implement a marketing strategy and derive marketing insights through Google Analytics. However, when utilized and interpreted creatively and intelligently, Google Analytics arms arts managers with far more than just marketing insights, and gives users information to overcome major operational challenges. The following sections will outline some of the main operational challenges currently facing arts organizations as found by my research and provide potential Google Analytics tactics an arts manager can use to develop solutions.

1ST CHALLENGE: OBTAINING NEW AUDIENCES

Many arts organizations are constantly struggling to both bring in new patrons as well as maintain engagement among their existing base. Unfortunately, research shows that this hurdle is not going to disappear anytime soon due to a number of factors, as arts attendance has been on a steady decline over recent decades (Jacobs 2015). Arts organizations today need to be keenly aware of the portion of Americans that are considered by the National Endowment for the Arts to be “interested non-attenders,” and who make up a staggering 13% of the population, or 31 million Americans. These individuals are interested in consuming live art, but have trouble finding the time to fit it into their busy schedules due to the myriad of possibilities as to how they could spend their time.

Contributing to this phenomenon is the explosion of recent technology and the endless entertainment opportunities it provides. Arts organizations are not just competing against each other for potential patrons’ time; they are competing against a whole new force of mediums through which people spend their leisure time, much of which is free and easily accessible through mobile devices and at home. YouTube provides glimpses into virtually any concert though uploaded videos, Netflix stores tens of thousands of movies and television episodes, and services like Spotify and Apple Music house an endless supply of recorded music – no download or purchase required. In fact, research by the Pew Institute showed that 22% of respondents from a pool of arts organizations strongly or somewhat strongly agreed that digital technologies are “hurting arts organizations by decreasing attendance at in-person events” (Kristin Thomson 2013). However, many people still crave a personal experience with the arts and still highly value attending events in person. Arts organizations need to think of new ways to reach interested non-attenders and encourage them to spend their free time and money at events.

Another contributing factor is the aging population of the US that affects audiences attending the arts. Studies show that only 21% of people in their 20s attended the arts in 2011, which has declined from 33% in 1982. On the flip side, the share of people aged 60 and older attending the arts has
increased from 15% to 19% over the same 29 year span. (Deshmukh 2013). In order to combat this issue, arts organizations must focus on getting those under the average age of 50 in the door now, especially because this generation will be the parents of future generations of arts consumers down the road.

The nation’s shifting demographics is another important factor to consider. For instance, traditional gender roles are in transition. According to the National Association of Baby Boomer Women, baby boomers currently hold 90% of the country’s net worth, and it is projected that by 2030, women will hold more than half of that amount. (Faleris 2012). It will be key for arts organizations to recognize and address this trend from both a fundraising and programming perspective. It will be important to not only be aware of the gender breakout of current patrons, but to focus efforts to attract the attention of new female audiences through social media, as a recent Pew Internet poll showed that women account for the majority of all social media interactions (Maeve Duggan 2015). Additionally, arts organizations must recognize the increasing ethnic diversity among the US population. By 2043, the US Census Bureau projects that there will be no ethnic majority in the United States. Arts organizations will need to be able to offer programs and events that appeal to a wide variety of people from different backgrounds, and recognizing this trend early and acting accordingly will set them up for a better chance of long term success (Robert Bernstein 2012).

No matter what audience concerns affect your specific organization, Google Analytics gives all arts managers the power to answer the following questions about their current and prospective audience demographics based on website traffic in order to both determine understand demographic trends and how best to target and engage new audiences.
1.1 Obtaining New Audiences - Question #1: How many people were new to my organization’s website this week?

Let’s explore one way that Google Analytics can help address how to increase your organization’s audience attendance. In order to understand how many people are newcomers to your website, simply look to left menu on the Google Analytics main screen and click “Behavior” to access the “New vs Returning” Dashboard (Figure 2).

From here, you will see a dashboard (Figure 3) that shows the behavior of all visitors to your site, categorized as “New” or “Returning” users (a).

Note that Google Analytics allows you to change the time frame of the data capture in the top right of the menu (b). The column entitled “Sessions” shows the total number of visitors that viewed your page during the selected time frame (c), and the “Bounce Rate” column gives insight into “the percentage of single-page visits (i.e. visits in which the person left your site from the entrance page without interacting with the page)” (d). You can also see the average number of pages each visitor looked at and the amount of time they spent on your page before “bouncing” (e).

Note that in Figure 3, returning visitors stayed on the organization’s page almost 45 seconds longer than new users! Armed with this information, an arts manager can start to develop strategies to increase engagement among new users who, in the example organization, comprise nearly two-thirds of the total website visitors for the week. For instance, one could create a banner or graphic with messaging directing new users to important website features or exciting upcoming events to increase their engagement.
1.2 Obtaining New Audiences - Question #2: What kinds of people viewed my website?

Now that you know the general behavior of new versus returning users to your website, you can take a deeper dive to understand more about who falls into either category. In order to make sure that you have access to all of the available demographic analytics Google offers that I will be discussing in the following sections, make sure you enable Advertising Features. For information on how to turn these features on, visit the Google Analytics Help Page. Returning to your “New vs Returning” view and by clicking on the “Secondary Dimension” button, you can start to segment your audience according to a variety of measures.

By selecting the age category, you can see the age breakout of your new and returning audience according to the same metrics as described above. You can also opt to slice the data according to a whole other host of categories, such as the specific state or city they are located in. While Google Analytics does not yet offer the functionality to view the ethnic demographics of your page viewers, by slicing the data by views per city, you can dive into the demographics of each location further by looking at the wealth of statistics available from the U.S. Census Bureau. For instance, you could look at the average household incomes of the cities that had the most activity on your website to better understand how much disposable income they might have to better predict program attendance from certain areas.

![Figure 4: Changing Age Category](image-url)
1.3 Obtaining New Audiences - Question #3: How well are my social media campaigns directing people to my website, and what kinds of people are most affected?

While you are still under the “New vs Returning” behavior section, you can look at the source of how each visitor arrived at your website by simply clicking the “Source/Medium” button under the “Acquisitions” section in the “Secondary Measures” menu. Now you can see whether or not the user typed in your URL (labeled “Direct” below), or if they were directed to your site through another social media or search engine platform (Figure 5).

By clicking on one of the rows above, you can dive even deeper into the characteristics of each of these segments by selecting another secondary measure to look at, such as the gender or age bracket split. You’ll be able to see what social media channels younger demographics utilize more, and push ticket sales for the appropriate events or programs through direct links on the corresponding channel, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. Additionally, by instead adding the secondary dimension of “time of day” or “day of the week” for a particular channel, you can see when most engagement occurred for that platform. For instance, the example below shows most activity from Facebook to the site happened between the hours of 8 and 10 PM (Figure 6).

This organization might consider posting portions of their campaign around this time in order to boost page views. Understanding who visits your website, when, and from where is key to developing an effective social media strategy to drive new and retain current business.
1.4 Obtaining New Audiences - Question #4: How do we convert interested parties into audience members?

Arts organizations can increase their reach by making sure everything besides the art itself is of high quality with limited barriers. This can be achieved by using technology strategically to provide a positive consumer experience throughout the full engagement cycle. For consumers constantly bombarded with options on how to spend their limited time and money, ease of ticket purchase can be the deciding factor when deciding whether or not to attend an event, and seamless ticket purchase functionality built into an organization’s website can be vital.

Google Analytics allows users to understand the demographic differences between people that were interested in purchasing tickets versus actually going through with the transactions. By setting up both the ticket purchasing page and the “Thank You for Your Purchase” display page as their own independent “views,” you can compare the demographic characteristics of each population using the filtering process discussed above. For instance, the hypothetical scenario in Figure 7, below, shows the difference in gender breakout between the ticket purchasing page (A) and the subsequent display page if the consumer actually went through with the purchase (B). One can see that the conversion rate is a little less than half (by dividing 58 k by 122 k), and the ratio of men to women who went through with the purchase declined compared to the ratio for those interested. It would serve this organization well to analyze their messaging about the event on the ticket-purchasing page in order to understand the causes behind this disparity.

This organization could also use these demographic insights as they decide which mailing lists to purchase, or what email lists they will acquire from peer organizations.

Figure 7: Demographic Information
Google Analytics also gives organizations the ability to set “goals” (for more information on how to set up a goal for your organization, visit Google Analytics Support). Organizations interested in tracking the characteristics and behaviors of those who purchase tickets can set this as a specific “goal,” allowing for easy monitoring. Now, every time you slice your data, no matter what characteristic or timeframe you select, your goal’s conversion rate will be part of your analytics main frame, seen below in red:

The view above would be particularly telling for an organization looking to understand the difference between behaviors of ticket purchasers on mobile devices compared to desktops for specific age ranges. Although the sample organization did not have any goal completions during the specific time period the data was pulled, if there was significant activity, it would be telling to compare the characteristic breakouts to try to understand if there were differences. Tailored strategies or page updates could be implemented to increase conversion on certain devices or age brackets (i.e. better form layout for mobile devices, etc.). For more information on how to increase ticket sales through Google Analytics, see the steps detailed in AMT contributor Kristen Sorek West’s report.

![Figure 8: Goal Setting](image)
2ND CHALLENGE: INCREASE FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Fundraising is a vital component to keeping non-profit arts organizations afloat, and it is to the advantage of all arts organizations to constantly identify potential donors. While older generations have been the traditional bulk of arts benefactors, the age demographic shifts mentioned above signal a need for all arts organizations to focus on younger targets. Although there are many avenues through which organizations can receive funding from interested donors, website donation functionality is an important channel for both corporate and individual sponsors to make their pledge. In fact, the recent 2013 eNonprofit Benchmarks Study showed that online giving increased by 20% from the previous year thanks to a variety of factors including social media campaigns, targeted email messaging, and enhanced website design. Although this is good news for non-profit arts organizations, the ease of donating online also increases the competition for donations. Crowdsourcing sites such Kickstarter, GoFundMe.com, Indigogo and more have made it easy and trendy for anyone to donate money to a cause, as confirmed by the staggering climb from $1.5 billion to $5.1 billion in crowdfunding donations from 2011 to 2013 (Arter 2014).

2.1 Increase Fundraising Efforts – Question #1: How should I set up my site in order to ensure I maximize the potential amount of online donations?

A simple way to ensure the highest chance of fundraising success in this arena on your own website is to create three sequential pages and tag them as “views” in Google Analytics:

1. A page providing information about becoming a donor on your site, including clear messaging as to why a contribution should be made (i.e. what social value will it provide) and with a strategically positioned “donate now” button.

2. A simple online form for interested parties to fill out to make their instant donation.

3. A “Thank You for Your Donation” page with some messaging around the social benefit they just contributed to, and will serve as a way to track the demographics of those who completed the transaction.

Once the front end of your fundraising portion of your site is up and running, there are a couple of additional administrative steps you must complete in Google Analytics before you can start optimally monitoring the success.
2.2 Increase Fundraising Efforts – Question #2: How do I set up Google Analytics to track the amount of donations I’ve received online?

First, by setting up Ecommerce tracking, Google Analytics allows you to track the dollar value and amount of online donations you’ve received. To learn how to set up Ecommerce tracking, visit the Google Analytics support page. Next, you should set up online donations as a “goal” (see section 1.4 for more information on “goals”). You’ll be able to monitor a variety of measures around who donates through your site by linking the goal to your “Thank You for Donating” page. In fact, Google Analytics makes the goal process easy for fundraising efforts by providing a ready-made template specifically for online donations (Figure 9).

Now that you’ve set up Ecommerce tracking and created your Donations “goal,” you will be able to analyze your online donations in a variety of ways. For instance, every time you click on the “Goals” page under “Admin,” your “Donation goal” will be clearly displayed on the dashboard. This will show the number of “conversions,” corresponding to the amount of people that visit your site and subsequently end up making a donation over the past 7 days (Figure 10). Additionally, no matter what characteristic you are viewing your data by, you will always be able to see the associated dollar figures in the “goal” columns which will be further explained in the next section.

Figure 9: Goal Setup

Figure 10: Donation Goal
2.3 Increase Fundraising Efforts – Question #3: How do I understand the characteristics of individuals that are interested in donating online vs. those who actually go through with the transaction?

By applying the view comparison process that you learned in section 1.4, you'll be able to analyze viewer's demographics, the respective dollar amounts associated with their donation, and their traffic patterns, such as if they arrived at your site through an email, through a social media post click through, or elsewhere. Since you've already set up your online donation goal, it will now be even easier to track the conversion rate from the preceding pages (i.e. Donation Information and Donation Form). You'll be able to take an in-depth look into the source of where these groups of people are coming from, and potentially provide more information about donating to the organization on these channels. For instance, if you determine that the majority of donations are stemming from users that connected to your site through Facebook, it would be a good idea to increase the donation messaging through that platform. Taking this a step further, since you are now able to check to see the time of day/day of the week people visit your site the most, you can now post even more strategically.

2.4 Increase Fundraising Efforts – Question #4: How do I understand how much my social media platforms are contributing to online donations?

Thanks to the Google Analytics administrative settings you've already taken advantage of, you will also be able to manually calculate the average donor value per traffic source based on your Ecommerce and Goal figures. By visiting “channels” in the Acquisition section on the main left menu and selecting the “social” (Figure 11), you will be able to run a quick calculation that shows the average dollar value each social media channel brings in by dividing each row from the column Goal Value 1 (A) by the amount of sessions (B) for that corresponding channel. Running these numbers is helpful to understand what social media platforms are bring in the most donations, and you could even run the figures over different time periods to gain insights into campaign success. Facebook, it would be a good idea to increase the donation messaging through that platform. Taking this a step further, since you are now able to check to see the time of day/day of the week people visit your site the most, you can now post even more strategically.

Figure 11: Donation Goals and Social Media
3RD CHALLENGE: TARGET NEW EXPANSION AREAS

An exciting yet challenging decision for many successful arts organizations is whether or not to expand programing to an additional location site apart from their home location(s). Once the decision has been made to move forward with broadening your geographical reach, many factors come into play during the vetting process for a new spot, including space availability, rent and operating costs, transportation access, distance from current location, surrounding commerce, and nearby potential or current partners or competitors. However, one factor that should not be overlooked is the demand that you will face in each of the potential areas you are looking into. Google Analytics provides a variety of metrics that can provide insights that most likely would have gone unknown.

3.1 Target New Expansion Areas – Question #1: Besides our current location(s), where are people located that are interested in our organization?

Google Analytics geolocation features allow you to discover areas of potential opportunity by clicking on “Location” in the “Geo” section located in the main screen left menu. This allows you to view where all current page viewers sit according to various levels of location granularity such as country, state, or city, as in Figure 12.

Allowing for an easy visual display of the state or country you are interested in, Google Analytics provides handy heat maps that accompany geographic information (Figure 13). For instance, if you are a ballet organization looking to expand beyond your site in San Francisco, you might see by the figures and heat map that a significant portion of your out of town page views come from Los Angeles. All things being equal, looking into establishing a new program or partnering with an existing organization or might be an attractive option because of your already established brand presence.

Figure 12: Geolocation Feature

Figure 13: Geolocation Feature
3.2 Target New Expansion Areas – Question #2: How can I use Google Analytics to find areas of opportunity I might not otherwise know about?

Google Analytics also gives you the ability to view what particular search engine searches led people to your page by clicking on Acquisition > Search Engine Optimization > Queries on the left main menu screen (Figure 14). Note that you will have to turn on Search Engine Optimization settings. For information on how to activate these settings, visit the Google Support page.

You’ll now see a chart that ranks the prevalence of the words that were paired together that brought an individual to your organization’s website. This can be particularly useful to drill down into specific areas of a city that is included in the search, giving you valuable insight to potential market demand that might have been unidentifiable otherwise. For instance, although we identified in the section above that a good portion of individuals from Los Angeles visiting the organization’s website, we can’t determine what specific neighborhood they are located in. If a certain neighborhood from Los Angeles was typed to the search engine often paired with the term “ballet,” the fact that these individuals ended up browsing your site could indicate potential opportunity.

These words can also be valuable if your organization wishes to engage in a Google Adwords campaign. By including these terms as your Adwords, you can maximize your visibility in Google’s search engine results. This is a great way to drive traffic to your website.

CONCLUSION

The suggested analytics throughout the report are just the beginning of the ways arts managers can begin to solve organizational problems through Google Analytics. Understanding who your website audience is, what their behaviors are on various pages, analyzing the reasons behind differences between different demographic groups and then following up with the appropriate courses of action can bring your organization’s success to new heights. When used effectively, Google Analytics holds the power to offer your organization much more than marketing insights. I recommend developing a list of operational problems that your organization is currently facing, and investigating the wealth of features available in Google Analytics to uncover some insights available from simply having your own website to begin to develop strategies for future success.


