

Understanding the difference between Google Analytics + Sailthru tracking

Clients have reached out to us asking why they're seeing discrepancies in campaign revenue, visitors or visits in Google Analytics (or their preferred web analytics tool) and Sailthru. This document addresses some of the discrepancies and provides explanations on why those could possibly occur.

Case 1: Purchases and revenue resulting from campaign emails are higher in Google Analytics than they are in Sailthru.

Google Analytics



Google Analytics stores the traffic source information in a cookie for 6 months by default.

If you do not specifically pass `&utm_nooverride=1` in your campaign links, Google Analytics will always credit the last campaign the user used to get to the site.

Consider this example:

- Today, a user clicks on your campaign email and proceeds to browse your site
- Tomorrow, that same user visits the site again by typing your URL directly in her browser (without engaging with any other marketing campaigns such as search, display, email, etc.)
- 36 hours after the campaign send, the same user makes a purchase.
- Google Analytics credits that purchase to the email you sent 36 hours ago, despite the fact the user has since come back on her own.

As a result of this approach, you will often times see campaign purchases / revenue in Google Analytics climb even days after you've sent a campaign.

Sailthru

At Sailthru we provide our clients with the ability to set a custom message cookie duration. The message cookie duration specifies the number of hours the `sailthru_bid` cookie is set for and identifies the message that a user most recently opened or clicked. We will only credit purchases to the campaign email if those purchases occur during the defined cookie window.

Consider this example:

- Your cookie duration is set to 3 hours, and your daily email deploys at 2pm
- At 5pm, one of your customers opens the email and clicks through to browse the site
- Any purchases made between 5pm and 8pm (a 3-hour window) will be attributed to that day's send, but any purchases made after 8pm will be counted as an unattributed purchase, with no credit given to that email.



Pixel vs. API

One other thing to note is that Google Analytics uses a pixel to track purchases whereas Sailthru uses an API. Pixels have a very high margin of error as they are very temperamental. For instance, refreshing the purchase confirmation page could lead to purchases being counted multiple times with pixel tracking. Apostrophes in product names or URL strings have also been known to cause issues with pixel tracking.

Sailthru's Purchase API tracking yields a much tighter reconciliation to clients' own internal reporting/ERP systems. We recently had a client note a ~20% margin of error between Google Analytics against an ERP system, with only a 0.2% margin of error against Sailthru.

Case 2: I'm seeing a higher number of visits in Google Analytics than total clicks in Sailthru. Shouldn't those numbers match? Wouldn't each click result in a visit?

Not necessarily. Let's say one of your customers clicks on an email you send today and proceeds to browse your site. Sailthru will count the email click (which can be inferred as a visit) and Google will credit the email campaign as one visit. But if the user visits the site again a few hours later (without clicking on the email or interacting with any other marketing campaigns or has shown more than 30 minutes of inactivity), the number of visits in Google Analytics would increase to two or more, whereas we'll still see just the one click in Sailthru.

In other words, the numbers don't always match up, because Sailthru looks at clicks, whereas Google Analytics and many other tools look at visits. The number of visits of a user can very easily increase without any subsequent clicks on an email message.