

AIP

ASSOCIATION OF
INDEPENDENT
PUBLISHERS

25

Google

Analytics

Terms

**Every South African Publisher
Should Know**

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MeD&Media
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COMMUNITY MEDIA
SUPPORT EVERY DAY

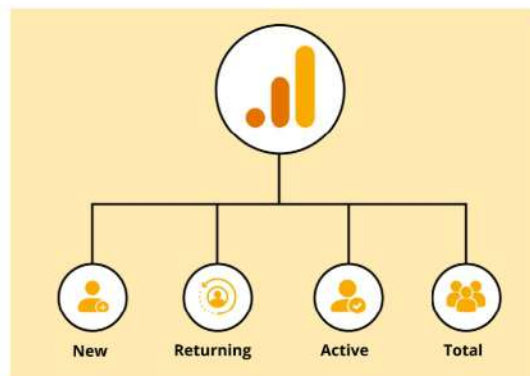


25 Google Analytics Terms Every Publisher's News Site Should Know In 2025

The Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) sees this glossary as an important guide for South African news publishers. It explains 25 key Google Analytics terms in simple, local language so that community and independent publishers can better understand their readers, how they find stories, and how they engage online. Written in the context of South African newsrooms, it helps publishers use data with confidence to grow their audiences and support sustainability.

Core Audience & Traffic

1. Users



The number of people visiting your publisher's news site. A user is counted through a device/browser combination, so the same person using a phone and a laptop may be seen as two users.

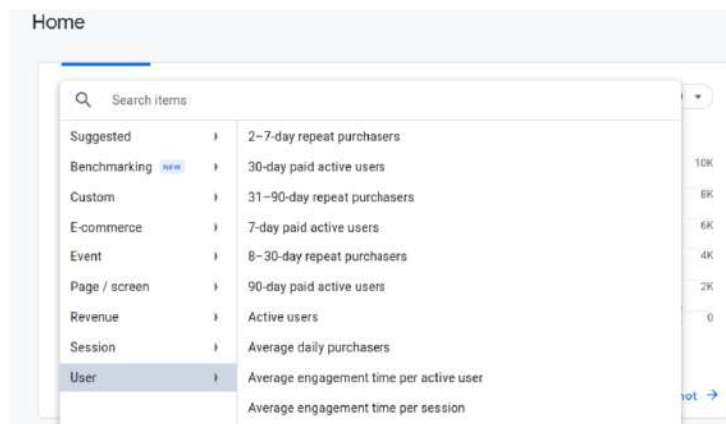
Example: For news publishers' sites, you can think of users as readers of your newspaper. If you buy one copy and read it multiple times, it's still one user. But if you borrow a copy from a friend, that could be counted as another user. Online, this works the same – **you may be seen as one user on your laptop and another on your mobile phone.** That's why it's important to encourage readers to register for newsletters or subscriptions to link them back to one loyal user.

2. Total/Active/New/Returning Users



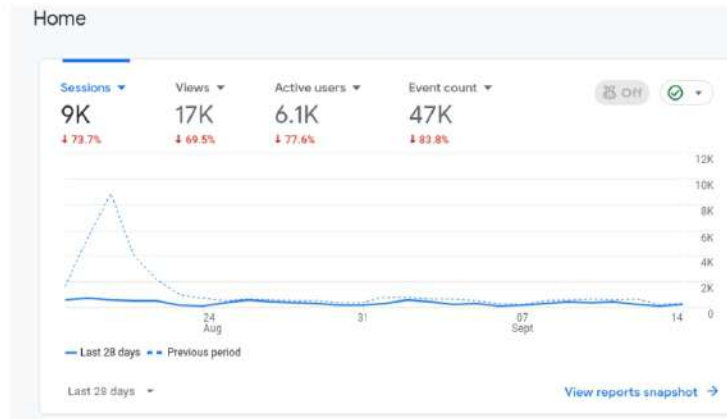
On its default home page, GA4 will show you the number of **Active Users** for a given timeframe. An Active User is what Google defines as “engaged”: they spend more than 10 seconds on site, or loaded a second page.

Click on Active Users, and you can select other metrics such as **Total Users** (all users including those who were not engaged). New users and Returning users should be of particular interest.



Example: On a news site, a “new visitor” is like someone buying your newspaper for the first time at the spaza shop. A “returning visitor” is like the same person coming back every week to buy it again. A healthy news site has both – new readers discovering you, and returning readers showing loyalty.

3. Sessions



A session is one visit to your news site. It includes all the activity a reader does until they leave or are inactive for 30 minutes.

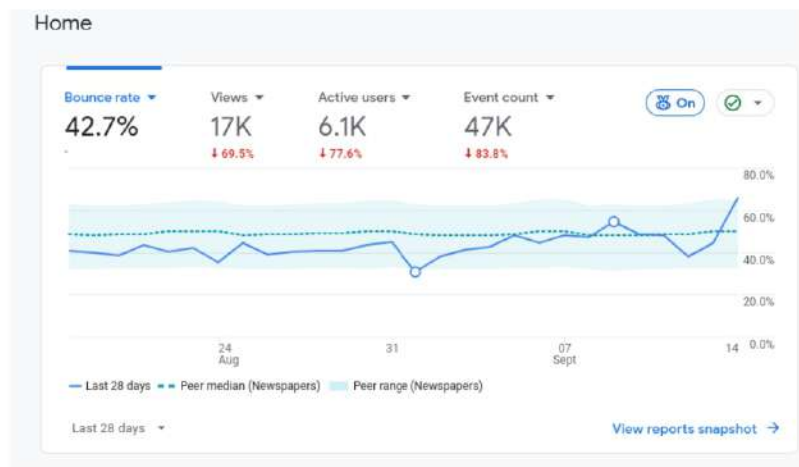
Example: Think of a session like a person sitting down with your print paper. From the time they open it to the time they finish, that's one reading session. **If they come back later to read more, it counts as another session.**

4. Views

The total number of times pages are viewed on your site.

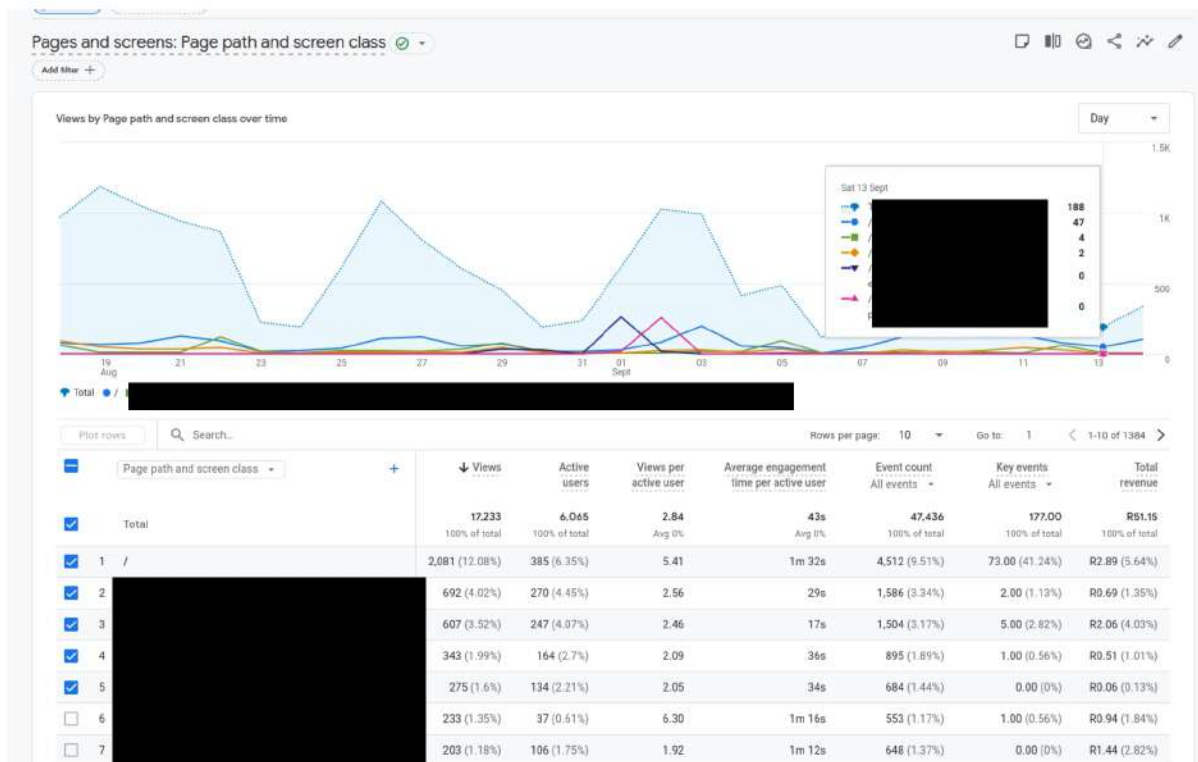
Example: If a reader looks at five different articles on your site in one sitting, that's five page views. It's similar to a reader flipping through five articles in the print newspaper.

5. Bounce Rate



Percentage of visitors who land on a page and leave without clicking to another.
Example: If a reader lands on one story and leaves without exploring, that's a bounce. It's like someone picking up your newspaper, reading one headline, and putting it down without reading more.

6. Views per Active User

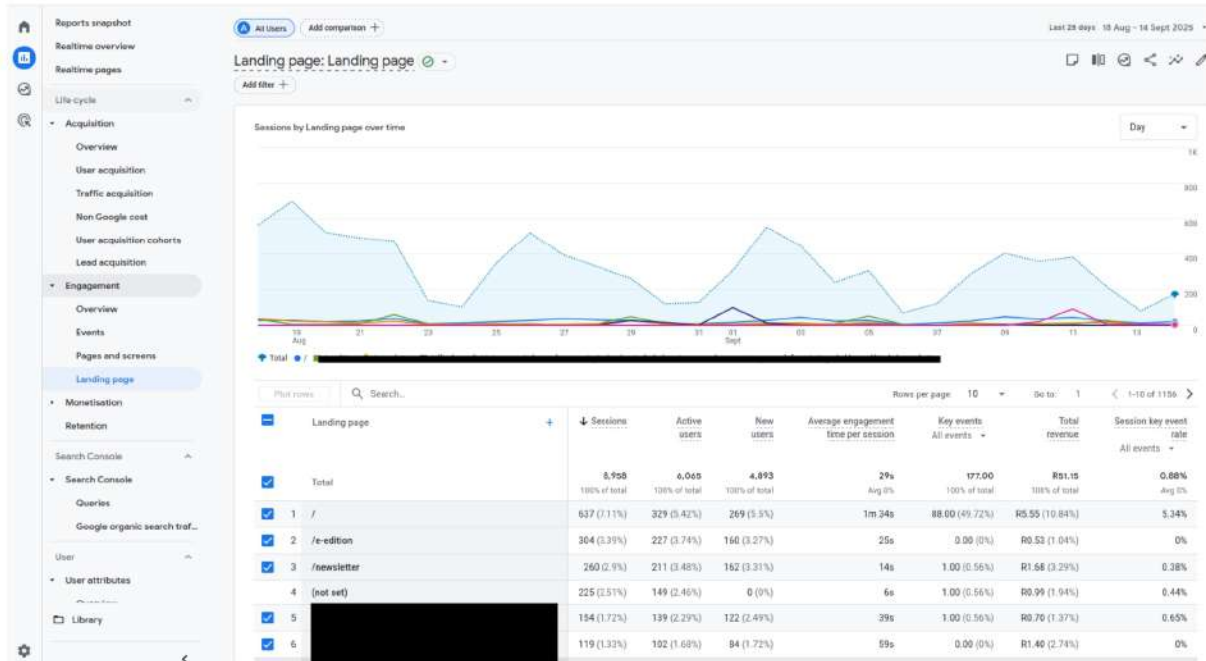


Under **Reports>Engagement>Pages and screens** you will find detailed breakdowns of how people read your site, including the number of views a page has and the number of Active Users who have seen it. **Views per Active User** shows how many times readers return to a page. For the homepage, this might be quite high, but for story pages if the number Views per Active User is more than two, you may have an issue with your analytics configuration.

7. Average Engagement Time per Active user

In the same screen, you will see Average Engagement Time per Active User for each page and story. This is a measure of how long readers spent on that page. It automatically excludes time when the reader is in another browser tab. More than 20-30 seconds engagement time means readers are taking their time to read.

8. Landing Page (Entry Page)



Under **Reports>Engagement** you will find an option to view **Landing page**. This shows the page a reader arrived at when they began their session.

Example: If someone clicks a Facebook link to your story, that story is their landing page. In print, this is like the first page they open when they pick up the newspaper.

9. Exit Page

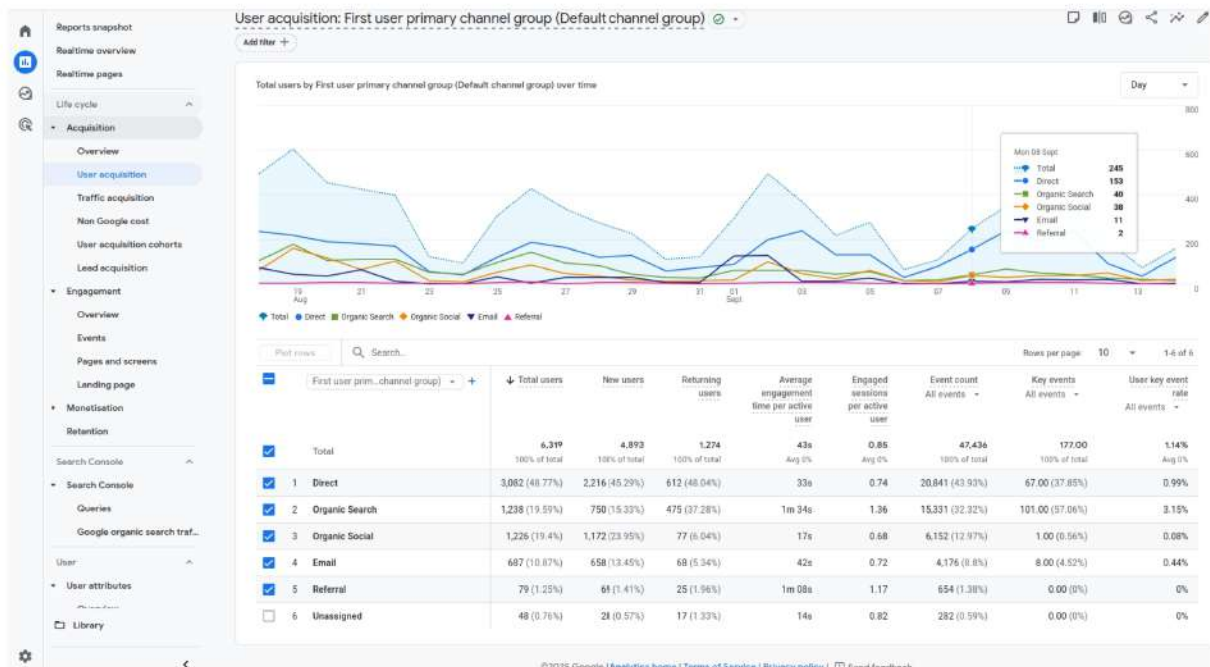
The **last page a reader visits before leaving the site**. This is a metric which can only be read in the more complex Explore section of Google Analytics, and tells you the page people were on when they left your site. You can also find out the URL of any link they clicked to an external source.

Example: If many readers exit from your opinion page, it could mean they found what they needed there. It's like finishing the sports section in print and putting the paper down.

Acquisition

Acquisition tells you where readers were before they arrived at your publisher’s news site. It shows whether they clicked from Facebook, found you on Google, or followed a link from another website or newsletter. For news publishers, this is like knowing whether your readers bought the newspaper at the local spaza shop, picked it up at the taxi rank, or had a friend pass it along. Understanding traffic sources helps you see which platforms bring in the most readers and where to focus your efforts.

10. Acquisition - How did they find your site?

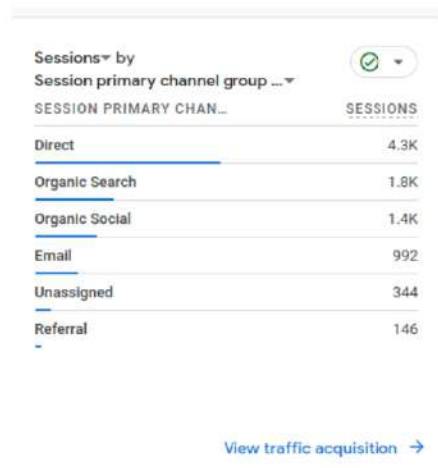


Reports showing how people find your news site – search engines, social media, direct typing, or other sites.

Example: If readers come from Google, Facebook, or a link on another website, acquisition shows you where they started.

It’s like knowing whether user they bought your print newspaper at the **corner shop, the supermarket, or got it from a friend.**

12. Direct Traffic



SESSION PRIMARY CHAN...	SESSIONS
Direct	4.3K
Organic Search	1.8K
Organic Social	1.4K
Email	992
Unassigned	344
Referral	146
-	-

[View traffic acquisition](#) →

Direct Traffic is important to understand because it does not mean readers who arrived at your site directly by typing the URL into their browser bar.

Any traffic for which Google cannot identify the source gets put into Direct. This includes: Any readers from Google Discover; any readers who click a link without attribution (eg. in WhatsApp); any readers using browser tools to block tracking; any readers who type your URL directly into their browser.

For the vast majority of websites, most Direct traffic really comes from **Google Discover**. You can find more information about this in **Google Search Console**.

Direct absolutely should not be used as a loyalty metric – in fact, readers coming from WhatsApp or Discover are more likely to be low retention.

13. Organic Search

Readers who find your site through unpaid search results.

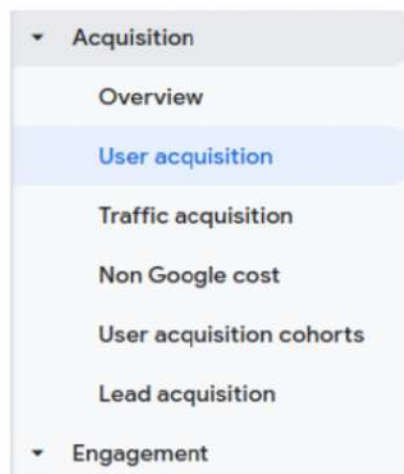
Example: If someone Googles “**latest Limpopo news**” and finds your story, that’s organic search. It’s like readers asking around in the community where to get the best local paper.

14. Referral Traffic

Visitors coming from **links** on other websites, where that website either shares tracking data or includes a **UTM code** in its links.

Example: If another community organisation links to your story, and readers click that link, it's referral traffic. It's like someone recommending your paper at a taxi rank.

15. User acquisition vs Traffic acquisition



You will see two options for analysing traffic in the default reports. **User acquisition** tells you which source a reader came from on their first session in the period. **Traffic acquisition** will tell you where every session originated.

16. Source/Medium

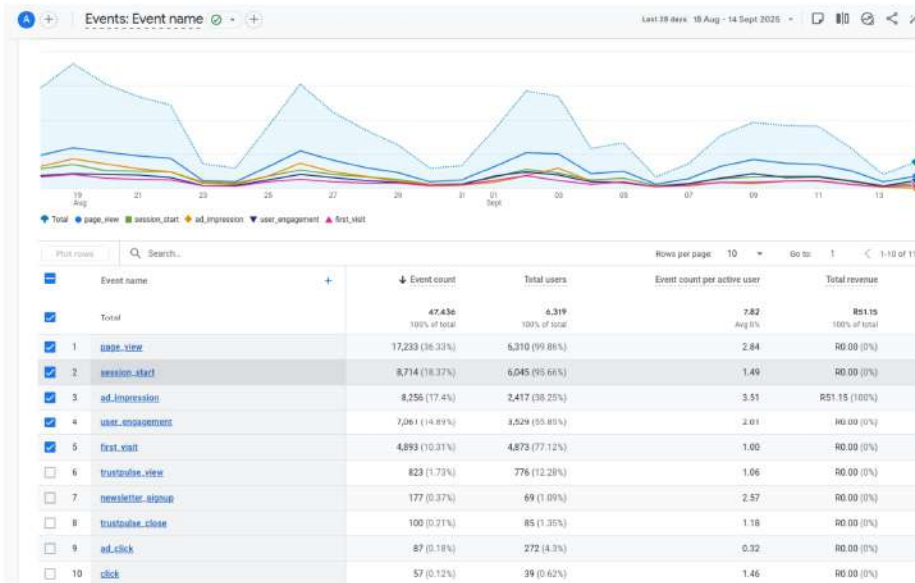


You can change the view from **Default Channel Grouping**, which gives you high level information about acquisition, to **Source/Medium**. Shows **exactly** where traffic comes from (e.g. facebook.com / social, google.com / organic).

Example: Instead of just knowing “**social media**,” you’ll see it was “**Facebook**.” It’s like knowing which shop sold the most copies of your paper.

Reader Behaviour & Engagement

Reader Behaviour & Engagement shows how people interact with your publisher’s news site once they arrive. It tells you what stories they read, how long they stay, which pages they click on, and where they leave. For publishers, it’s like watching how a reader uses your printed paper — do they read the front page only, or do they flip through to sports, classifieds, and opinion pieces? By studying behaviour and engagement, you can see which content keeps readers interested and how to encourage them to return more often.



17. Events

Every action, including a View, is an event in GA4. Generally we use these to track specific actions like clicks, downloads, video plays. It is possible - although complex - to set up events to track specific button clicks or the visibility of certain elements like pop-ups or calls to action.

Example: If a reader clicks “play” on an audio interview, that’s an event. It’s like someone cutting out a coupon from your print paper – a small action showing engagement.

18. Scroll depth

By default, GA4 records a Scroll depth event when a reader reaches 90% of a page, suggesting they have read everything on it. It is possible to refine this, and determine how many readers pass the 25%, 50% and 75% length of a story.

19. Clickthrough Rate (CTR)

Click-Through Rate

$$CTR = \frac{\text{Clicks}}{\text{Impressions}} \times 100$$

Percentage of people who click after seeing a link or button.

Example: If 100 people see your “subscribe” button and 10 click it, that’s a 10% CTR. In print, it’s like including a phone number and seeing how many people actually call.

Let’s say your publisher’s news site publishes a story with a button at the bottom that says “**Subscribe to our Newsletter.**”

- The story page is shown **1,000 times** (1,000 impressions).
- Out of those, **120 readers click** the “Subscribe” button.

The formula for CTR is:

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The formula for CTR is:

$$CTR = \frac{\text{Number of Clicks}}{\text{Number of Impressions}} \times 100$$

So in this case:

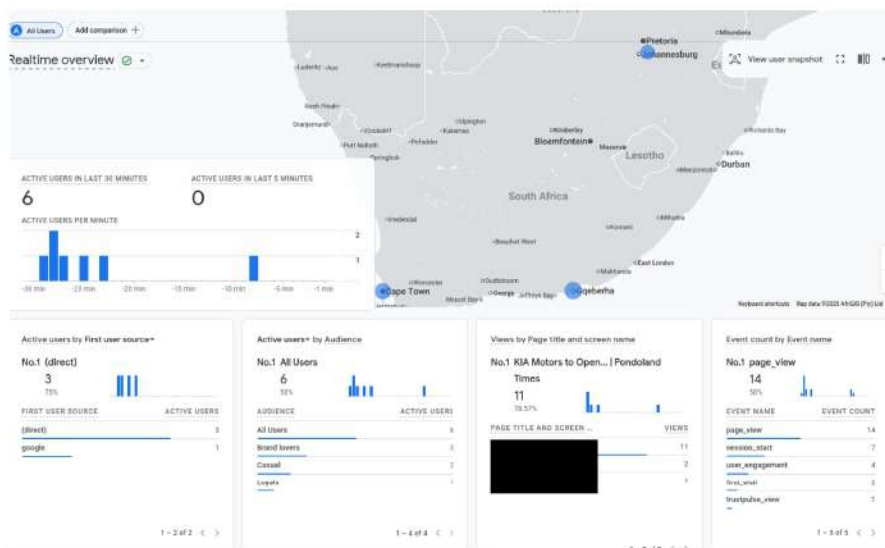
$$CTR = \frac{120}{1000} \times 100 = 12\%$$

In simple terms: For every 100 readers who saw the button, 12 clicked on it. That means your CTR is **12%**, which is a strong sign that readers found the offer useful or interesting.

Content & Performance

Content & Performance looks at how well the stories, pages, and features on your publisher's news site are working. It shows which articles get the most readers, how long people stay on them, and what content leads to deeper engagement like subscriptions or shares. For publishers, it's like checking which sections of your newspaper — front page, sport, or classifieds — get the most attention. Understanding content and performance helps you decide what stories resonate with your audience and where to improve.

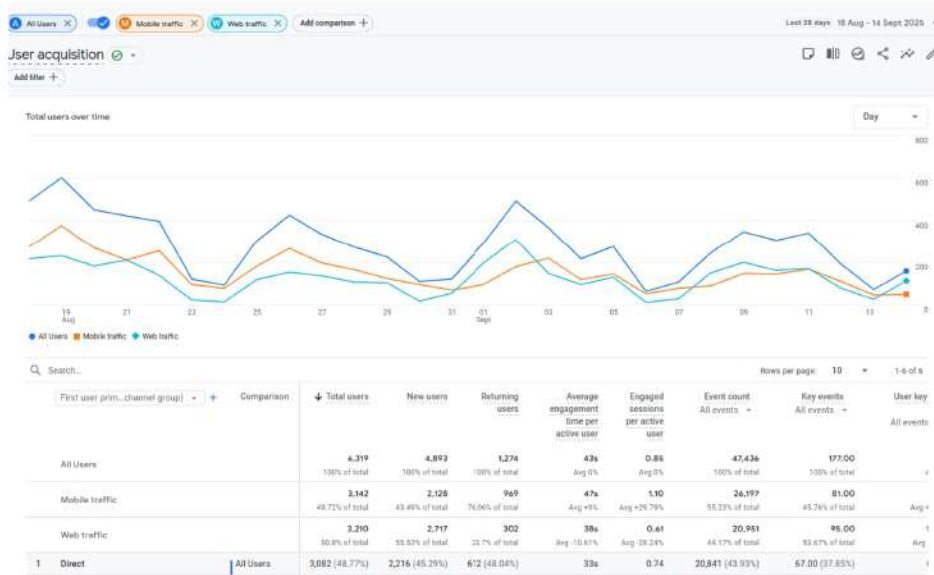
20. Realtime overview



Shows activity from the last 30 minutes – who is currently on your site, what they're reading, and where they're from.

Example: During a breaking news story, you can see how many people are reading it right now. It's like **standing outside your print vendor and counting how many papers are being bought on the spot.**

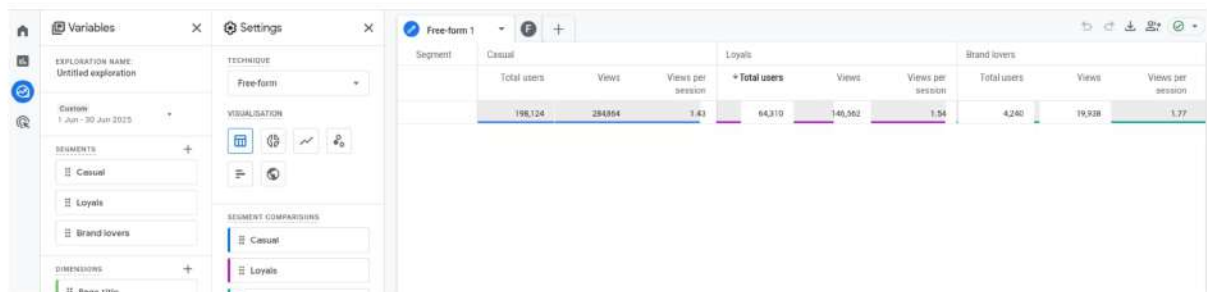
21. Comparisons and filters



Filters that let you analyse metrics by different reader characteristics, like mobile vs desktop.

Example: You might create a segment for mobile users to see if they prefer shorter stories. It's like printing an isiZulu edition and checking if those readers engage differently from English readers.

22. Audiences and segments



One advanced technique is to build **Audiences** and **Segments**, either in the **Explore** section or under **Admin**. These are highly customisable ways of building a reader profile and useful for understanding loyalty. For example, a segment of readers who visit more than five times a month could be used as a proxy for “Weekly readers”.

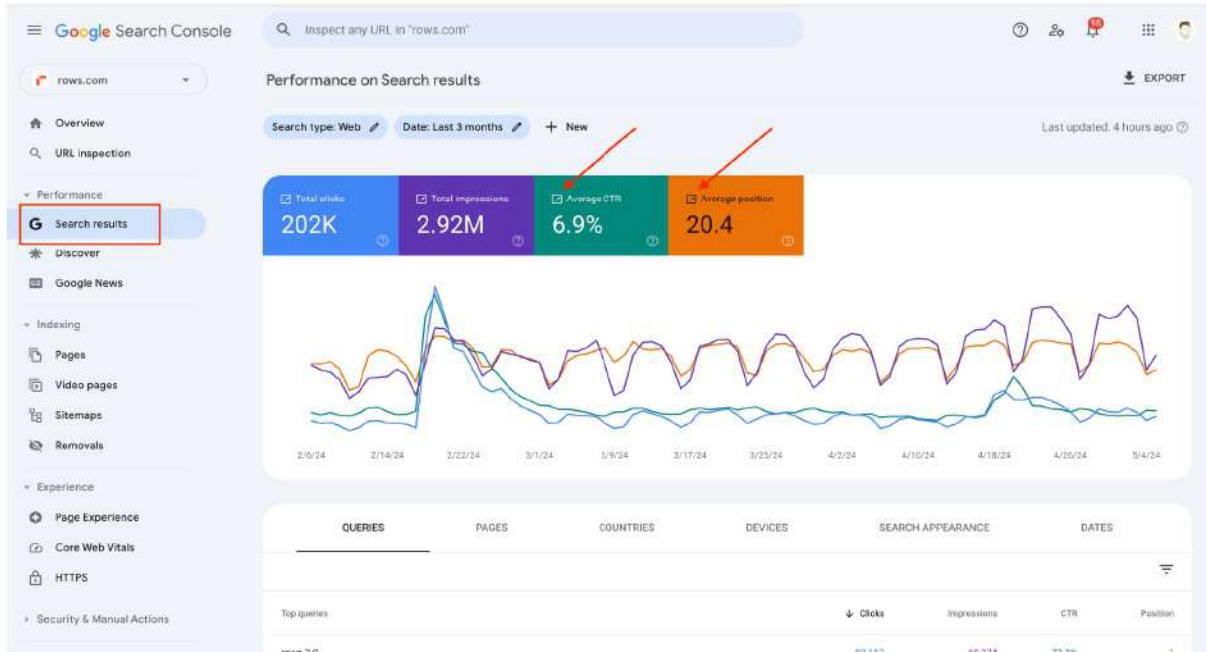
23. Attribution Model



Rules about how credit is given to traffic sources for bringing in readers.
Example: If a reader first found you on Google but later came directly to your site, attribution decides which source gets the credit.

It's like asking if the **sale happened because of the radio advert** or because the reader later saw the poster in the spaza shop.

24. Keyword (via Google Search Console)



The words readers type into search engines to find your news articles.

Example: If people search “Mzansi load shedding updates” and find your article, that’s a keyword. In print, it’s like knowing what headlines make people buy your paper.

Closing Reminder (25): EEAT for Publishers' News Sites

If you are thinking about Search Engine Optimisation, and how to increase the number of readers referred to your site by Google Search, Google Discover or a generative search engine (Google AI Overviews or ChatGPT), remember the key advice is to ensure your content meets Google's quality guidelines. In particular, it is viewed through the lens of **Experience, Expertise, Authority, and Trustworthiness (E-EAT)**:

- **Experience:** Have you or your newsroom covered this issue before?
- **Expertise:** Do your journalists have the knowledge to report accurately (are your author bios up-to-date and easy to find)?
- **Authority:** Is your site recognised as a reliable news source and linked to by others?
- **Trustworthiness:** Is your content accurate, free of errors, and transparent with sources and contact details (this includes technical errors, like poor layout or HTML errors)?

And remember: Google now ranks sites mobile-first, so always ensure your news stories are easy to read on phones.