Attribution
Playbook

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Marketing attribution in Google Analytics

Savvy marketers understand that you don't capture your audience with just one message, just one picture, or just one perfectly placed advertisement. It's a complex process of planting the seed, nurturing it, and finally harvesting the fruits of your marketing efforts.

Before your customers buy or convert, they may see many different parts of your online marketing campaign – including paid and organic search, email, affiliate marketing, display ads, mobile placements, and more. Each of these elements has an impact on your results.

With marketing attribution modeling, you can assign value to all of the factors that contributed to a sale. When done well, it can help you to make better decisions about the future. Yet how do you know which models to use, or how much credit to assign?

In this playbook, we'll explore common attribution models and share some thoughts on how to get started with Attribution Modeling in Google Analytics. You'll learn how to quickly build, customize, and compare models, so you can get the most out of your marketing programs.

Bill Kee
Product Manager, Google Analytics

Plan your approach to attribution

Like any analysis tool, Attribution Modeling is most effective when you have a clear goal: define your analysis questions, and make a plan for what you learn.

1. Start by identifying your marketing goals. Are you focused on branding and awareness, lead generation, developing new business, or repeat business? Are your current campaigns meeting these objectives?

2. Develop a basic outline for your customer journey, including path length, time to conversion, and the relevant marketing channels. You can find this information in the Multi-Channel Funnels reports in Google Analytics. Look for key details: does the path differ based on the first touchpoint? Does it differ by order size or product category?

3. Think about how you assign credit to these interactions today – even if you're new to attribution modeling, you surely have some sort of intuitive model. What would happen if you valued interactions in the path differently?

4. Define the role and expected impact of each campaign element. When you start modeling, check whether the models match or contradict your expectations.

5. Plan your next steps. If you learn that a certain campaign, source, or interaction is performing differently than expected, will you be able to take action to change it?

Once you've identified your analysis questions, you should explore different attribution models and determine which are best suited to your marketing goals. It's important to compare multiple models to learn about different aspects of your marketing program.

Select your attribution models

Start with these commonly used models, then compare and customize to best reflect your campaign goals.
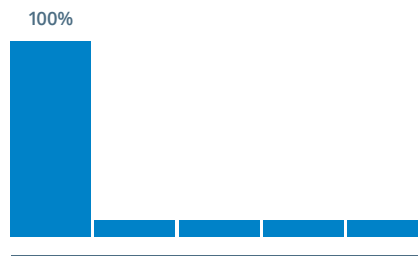
Last Interaction
The Last Interaction model attributes 100% of the conversion value to the last channel with which the customer interacted before buying or converting. This model is extremely common – most likely you're already using some version of it – so it's a great baseline for comparison with other models.

First Interaction
The First Interaction model attributes 100% of the conversion value to the first channel with which the customer interacted. This model can help you understand which campaigns create initial awareness. For example, if your brand is not well known, you may value keywords or channels that first exposed customers to the brand.

Linear
The Linear model gives equal credit to each channel interaction on the way to conversion. This model might be used if your campaigns are designed to maintain contact and awareness with the customer throughout the entire sales cycle. In this case, each touchpoint is equally important during the consideration process.
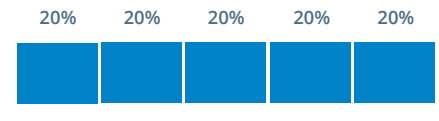
Each of these models has different characteristics. The best results will come from a comparison of multiple models and experimentation to confirm your findings.
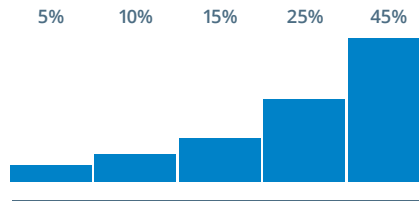
Position Based

The Position Based model allows you to assign credit based on position in the customer journey. The first position highlights campaigns that introduce customers, while the last emphasizes those that close conversions. This model can be used to give more credit to those interactions, or to assign customized weights according to position.
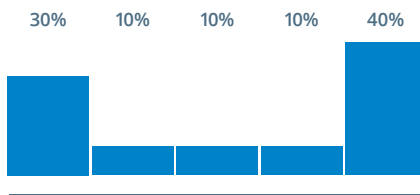
Time Decay

The Time Decay model assigns the most credit to touchpoints that occurred nearest to the time of conversion. If the sales cycle involves only a short consideration phase – for example if you're running a one or two-day promotion – then interactions that occurred a week earlier would have less value than those during the promotion window.

Customized

A Customized model allows you to more accurately reflect your marketing programs. With Attribution Modeling in Google Analytics, you can easily create custom credit weightings based on position (first, last, middle, assist), touchpoint type (click or direct visit), and campaign or traffic source (campaign, keyword, and more).

30%	10%	10%	10%	40%

5%	10%	15%	25%	45%

5%	25%	15%	45%	10%
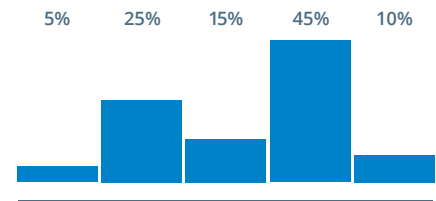
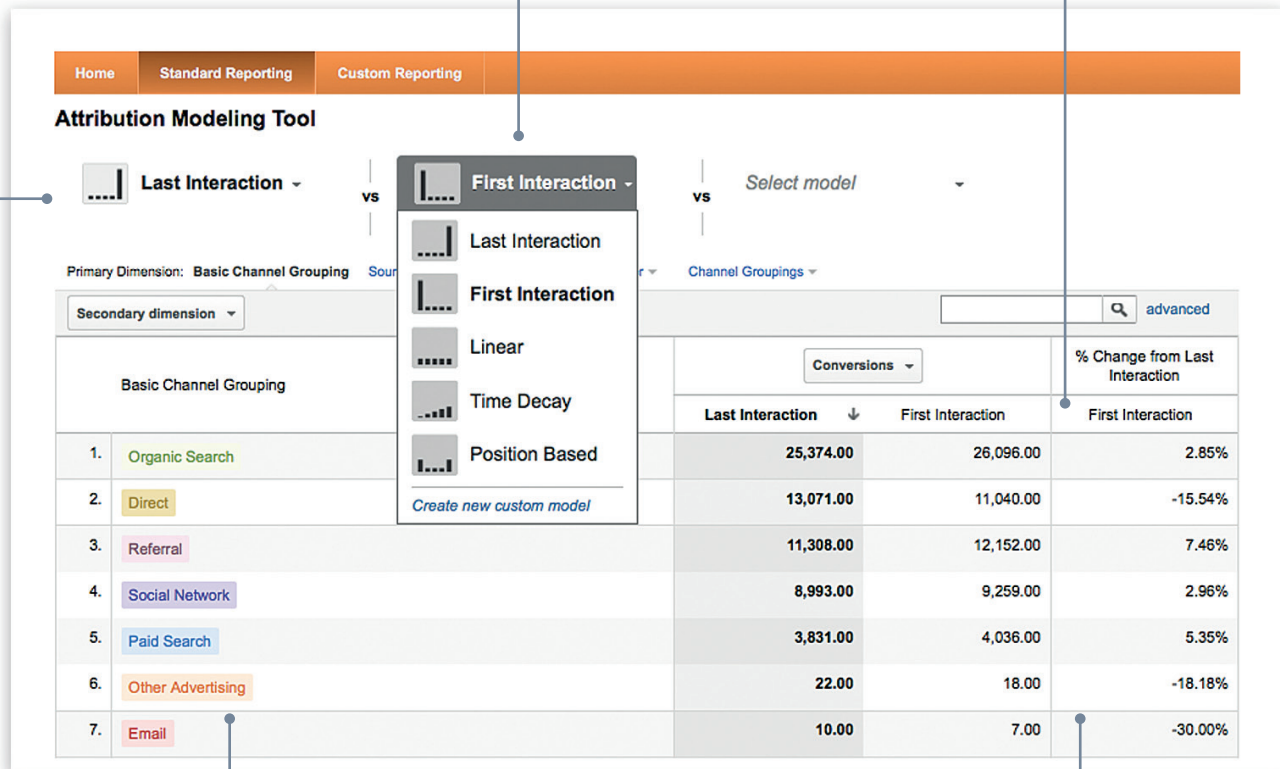# Start modeling in Google Analytics

Now that you've planned your approach and learned about the common attribution models, it's time to begin modeling and analyzing.

1. Ensure that you have Goals or Ecommerce tracking set up in Google Analytics, and check that these reflect your campaign objectives. The Attribution Modeling tool will automatically pull in this data.

2. Find the Attribution Modeling tool in the Conversions > Multi-Channel Funnels section of Google Analytics.

3. Select your model type. The first model you choose should be the one you use most often today – usually last interaction.

4. Review the data table: you'll see how many conversions and how much value the model credits to different channels, referral sources, campaigns, or other dimensions.

5. Choose another model for comparison; you can use a standard model or create a customized model. View up to three models at a time.

6. Compare the conversion values for your models using the percentage change column. Sort this column to see which channels, referrals, or campaigns gained or lost the most value.

7. Pay attention to big changes in value: for example, you may find a certain keyword or display advertisement shows low revenue value under the last interaction model, but receives more credit under another model.

8. Consider taking action. You may wish to change bidding strategies, move ad placements, adjust affiliate payments, or update your landing pages to get the maximum benefit out of strong keywords and channels and to increase the value of low performers.

select your model type

compare up to three models simultaneously

handy metrics to quickly evaluate differences between models

| Home | Standard Reporting | Custom Reporting |

Attribution Modeling Tool

Last Interaction ▾   vs   First Interaction ▾   vs   Select model ▾

Last Interaction
First Interaction
Linear
Time Decay
Position Based

Create new custom model

Primary Dimension: Basic Channel Grouping   Sour...r ▾   Channel Groupings ▾

Secondary dimension ▾

Conversions ▾

% Change from Last Interaction

	Basic Channel Grouping	Last Interaction ↓	First Interaction	First Interaction
1.	Organic Search	25,374.00	26,096.00	2.85%
2.	Direct	13,071.00	11,040.00	-15.54%
3.	Referral	11,308.00	12,152.00	7.46%
4.	Social Network	8,993.00	9,259.00	2.96%
5.	Paid Search	3,831.00	4,036.00	5.35%
6.	Other Advertising	22.00	18.00	-18.18%
7.	Email	10.00	7.00	-30.00%

see all your most important channels

values for each channel will change based on models chosen: instantly see value differences side by side

See the "Apply what you've learned" section of this playbook for ideas on how to act on your analysis.

Build customized models to fit your business

1. From the model drop-down menu, select "create new." Name your model and choose a baseline model to customize – Linear, Time Decay, or Position Based.

2. Define conditions to identify specific touchpoints in the conversion path based on position (first, last, middle, assist), touchpoint type (click or direct visit), and campaign or traffic source (campaign, keyword, and more).

3. Assign credit weighting rules to these touchpoints.

Sample customizations

- Adjust credit to a **channel**, such as display or search, based on the different role these channels play in your customer's path.

- Adjust credit based on **position**, for example increasing credit to a first touchpoint since it was influential in introducing the customer to your product.

- Adjust credit based on **site engagement**, for example by giving no credit to a search click that results in a bounce, or by increasing credit for referrals that lead to more than 5 minutes spent on your site.

- Adjust credit based on **timing**, for example by customizing the time decay model to give more weight to interactions closer in time to conversion.

- Give credit to **the upper funnel**, for example by increasing the weight of social interactions for the value they have in generating initial awareness.

- Correct for **last click bias**, for example by discounting branded keywords when they are the last interaction. These clicks may be more navigational in nature and could be taking credit from interactions that did more work bringing a new customer to your site.

choose a baseline model for customization

define conditions to assign customized values based on characteristics such as position, traffic source and touch point type

Home	Standard Reporting	Custom Reporting

Attribution Modeling Tool

Last Interaction ▾

   vs   Select

Last Interaction

First Interaction

Linear

Time Decay

Position Based

Create new

ouping Source/Medium

Create or edit attribution model

Model name

Baseline model
Linear ▾

Apply custom credit rules

Include ▾ | Position in Path ▾ | Exactly matching | any ▾

  or

Add 'OR' statement

  and

Add 'AND' statement

credit 1 times other touch points in the conversion path

Save and Apply Cancel

	advanced

	eraction Conversion Value
	$47,489.86
	$52,057.25
	$22,932.77
4. Social Network	$1,922.88
5. Paid Search	$3,115.55
6. Other Advertising	$3.00
7. Email	$0.00
8. (Other)	$0.25

select "create new" to open the custom model builder

Apply what you've learned

Don't get stuck trying to build the "perfect model". Take action on what you've learned.

For example, attribution modeling might lead you to:

- Reallocate Budget: Strengthen campaigns along the most profitable position in the purchase funnel.

- Adjust Affiliate Payments: Consider building affiliate programs that compensate partners for the value that their referral provides to your business. For instance, some advertisers give more credit to affiliates that bring in new customers and provide awareness in the upper-funnel vs. those that simply offer coupon codes to customers who are ready to purchase.

- Revise CPA (cost-per-acquisition) figures: Better reflect the true contribution of your marketing activities to the whole consumer journey.

- Reduce Time-to-Conversion: Look for opportunities to improve the efficiency of your conversion path and reduce the number of paid clicks required to drive a purchase. For example, provide price guarantees so customers don't have to price shop, quick coupon codes, or more detailed product information so they don't have to look elsewhere.

- Reschedule campaigns: Change the timing of particular campaign types, such as email promotions.

- Update Landing Pages: Customers coming in through various channels and keywords are often at different points in their purchase decision-making. If you learn that particular keywords have lower-than-expected conversion value, you can design landing pages that will better reflect their stage in the purchase process.

- Keep Testing: Experiment with new keywords or campaigns to compensate for weak spots in your purchase funnel.

Attribution in action

The challenge
A mid-sized electronics retailer out of the eastern United States wanted to expand their customer base. Their branded search keywords were performing well, but their awareness campaigns seemed less effective.

Understanding the customer journey
Reviewing conversion paths for the past six months, they found that many customers that converted had clicked on generic terms before searching for their brand closer to purchase. Similarly, display ad clicks tended to precede direct visits.

Yet these campaigns were showing a very high cost-per-acquisition (CPA). Since the team had been using a last click attribution model, the keywords and display ads driving customers early in the purchase process received almost no credit.

Building models
With the Attribution Modeling Tool, the team defined a set of models that assigned value to upper funnel interactions. One model gave less credit to branded keywords. Another increased credit for first and last interactions. These models identified keywords and display ads that received credit for significantly more revenue than under the last click model.

Testing and results
The team took the biggest winners from each model and ran a test – increasing bids and coverage in select geographies. From the tests, they saw that neither model was perfect, but one did a better job of predicting outcomes – and they saw an overall increase in conversions at lower CPAs.

Next steps
The team used their findings to construct a new set of assumptions, creating new models to test so they could continue to refine their marketing programs.

Checklist for success

Compare and Customize:
There is no one size fits all model. Google recommends comparing different models and adjusting credit weightings based on your specific business needs. And remember that you'll use different types of models for different types of campaigns.

Experiment and Iterate:
If you discover new opportunities through modeling, run some experimental campaigns and try out different marketing strategies to see what effect this has on conversions. Then repeat the whole process. Make sure your models don't simply validate your current theories.

Sanity Check:
Beware of other limitations to online metrics – such as failing to capture the impact of multi-device use, or offline sales – and seek to compensate for these in your final analysis.

Collaborate with Peers:
One of the great impediments to successful attribution modeling is a siloed marketing organization. Check in with colleagues to make sure your models and experiments are aligned across departments.

Understand the Limitations:
Attribution will not answer every question. If different models give you contradictory views of your media performance and you cannot decide which to believe, then look for evidence – by running tests or conducting market research – to help you decide.

Embrace the Opportunity:
Today's new methods for looking beyond the last click are powerful even if they're not prescriptive. So start experimenting, and don't get stuck with an incomplete picture of your customer journey.

To get started, visit www.google.com/analytics

Google™ Analytics

www.google.com/analytics