***Getting started with Google Analytics***

It might seem like an advanced topic but knowing how people are interacting with your website is a really important way of making it better for them. Google Analytics is a great way in which to understand what people are doing when they visit your website and best of all, it’s completely free!

Please note that none of the information in this blog constitutes legal advice.

Before we get started with Google Analytics, it’s important to understand that we cannot use Google Analytics, or any other form of analytics tools, without first gaining explicit consent from those visiting your website. To do this we must use a technology called cookies, which registers a session on the website and then records various data so that you can begin to see how people are using your website.

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), in order to start logging a session using a cookie, we must specifically ask the visitor if they wish this to be set using something called a cookie notice. If they say no or do not say yes, we cannot set the cookie and therefore cannot record any information. Read more about cookies on the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) website.

**How do I create a Google Analytics account and link my website?**

It’s really simple and completely free to set up a Google Analytics account.

Go to google.com/analytics and click on the Start for free button

Set up a Property in your new Analytics account. A Property is simply a website (or other online application) that belongs to you and you wish to collect data about).

Set up a Reporting View for your new Property. A Reporting View is simply what data you wish to capture about one of your Properties.

Add the Tracking Code to your website. This is where you may need to contact the person who built or runs your website, if that isn’t you, as it involves adding some code to an area of your website called the “Header”. If you use a Content Management System (CMS) for your website, like WordPress or Drupal, you can download free plugins that makes adding your Tracking Code easy:

WordPress plugins

Drupal modules

Once you’ve gone through these steps, you can log into your Google Analytics account and see some basic information about your website. If you’ve just set this up for the first time, it might be worth waiting for a week or more to let data get collected before you start to analyse it.

**How do I set up a cookie notice?**

As mentioned earlier, you can only let Google Analytics capture data about someone’s session on your website if they give you explicit consent to do so. This means we need to set up our Google Analytics to only turn on when a visitor gives this explicit consent. We can do this via a cookie notice. You may need to contact the person who built or runs your website, if that isn’t you, as it involves adding some code to an area of your website called the “Header”. If you use a Content Management System (CMS) for your website, like WordPress or Drupal, you can download free plugins that makes creating a cookie notice easy:

WordPress plugins

Drupal modules

One of the great features of A Church Near You is that all this has been developed and is constantly updated on your behalf by the national digital team. We work with the web supplier to give you easy access to analytics on your church page(s) and also to ensure that the website stays up to date with GDPR, DPA 2018 and future legislation.

When you're logged in as an editor to A Church Near You, you're able to see the page visits to the church profiles you have access to.

**What do I do now?**

The great thing about Google Analytics is that there’s always new data coming through that you can learn from. Google Analytics Academy has a fantastic free video course that takes you through the basics of the application and how to act on the data. A few of the most important first steps with your new Google Analytics account is to look at:

Location: where are people visiting your website from? Does this help you with the kind of content you are writing for your website e.g. local services and events or drawing in people from further afield?

Traffic source: what websites are sending people to your website? Are they coming in from internet searches, social media websites or typing in your website URL?

Content: which content on your website is the most popular? Is it when your events are taking place, information about your children’s groups or your news updates?

Device: are more people accessing your website via a mobile device? If so, is your website mobile-ready and are you displaying your contact and location information prominently?

When you start to understand your website visitors, the content they are looking at and how they find your website, you can begin to tailor your online content to appeal to them and others like them. A great example of this is if you see that there’s a particular day and time when you get the most visitors on your news section. By publishing a new blog at that time, you should reach more visitors with your content.

**What do I do next?**

Google Analytics Academy offer a whole range of free online courses that cover everything you can do with their application. It goes on to talk about other applications they make available for free as well and is a great place to learn more about what you can do with Google Analytics.

One of the next things you might like to investigate is setting up Goals. Goals area a simple way to track actions people take on your website, like how many people signed up for an email newsletter or registered for an event. This allows you to see how effective your digital communications are in getting visitors to perform the actions you’re asking them to do and allows you to test different content to see what is the most effective.

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