

twentysix

Preventing Personally Identifiable Information in Analytics

“The Analytics terms of service, which all Analytics customers must adhere to, prohibits sending personally identifiable information (PII) to Analytics (such as names, social security numbers, email addresses, or any similar data), or data that permanently identifies a particular device (such as a mobile phone’s unique device identifier if such an identifier cannot be reset). **Your Analytics account could be terminated and your data destroyed if you use any of this information.**”

<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/2795983?hl=en>

Personally Identifiable Information

Relates to any data that can be recognizable to an individual.

- Names
- Email Address
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Address
- Passwords
- Bank Account Details
- Telephone Numbers
- National Insurance Numbers
- etc

Common Hit Types

Analytics has 4 common hit types. The first 3 being more susceptible to PII.



Page
tracking



Event
tracking



Ecommerce
tracking



Social
interactions

PII in Page Tracking

Personally identifiable information can enter analytics page tracking via page urls.

For example, when a user submits some information on a form and the information is appended to a /thank-you page URL.

```
http://www.example.com/cart/purchase?id=87120&cartitems=shoes&name=John+Doe&accountid=449&password=password123&billingaddress=44street+Leeds+LS110X&acc=11111111&sortcode=000001
```

As analytics fires on pageview, this means this data can appear in the following analytics reports:

- Page Reports
- Goal Reports
- User Flow Reports
- User Explorer Reports
- Custom Dimensions
- Any custom reports with affected page data

PII in Event Tracking

Event tracking is typically used on the website to track user interactions such as form field actions.

For example, as a user completes and moves on to subsequent fields in the form, events can collect in the following manner:

```
v=1&t=event&tid=UA-XXXXX-  
Y&cid=555&ec=Form%20Submissions&ea=Address&el=  
44-street-leeds-ls110x&ev=279.99
```

This data can appear in the following analytics reports:

- Event Reports
- User Explorer Reports
- Any custom reports with affected event data

PII in Ecommerce

In ecommerce tracking, PII data can appear via the product name, the transaction ID, coupon code and so on. This is especially so for personalised products or coupons which utilises users' email addresses.

```
ga('ec:addProduct', {'id': 'BC-John-Doe-1984',
'name': 'Personalised card - John Doe 1 Jan
1984 44 Leeds LS110X',
'category': 'Birthday Card',
'brand': 'ACME',
'variant': 'black',
'price': '6.00',
'coupon': 'hello@domain.com',
'quantity': 1
});
```

This data can appear in the following analytics reports:

- Product Performance Reports
- Transaction Reports
- User Explorer Reports
- Any custom reports with affected ecommerce data

Causes of PII Entering Analytics

Analytics doesn't actively seek out PII data. These problems mostly occur during development of the website.

For example:

- Using PII in query parameters for pages
- Dynamically pulling field values from forms without checking the output
- Dynamically appending PII data to other data (such as ecommerce tracking)

Personally Identifiable Information

- It is not possible to retrospectively remove this data from analytics, what is already in there will still remain even if settings were implemented to stop it moving forward.

Recommendation

- Do not use this data
- Perform a series of audits to understand the extent and identify the source of PII from the website
- Implement settings to stop PII data from coming into current analytics
- Ensure developers have a standard protocol to check for and prevent PII data being exposed and sent to third party tools such as analytics
- Back up existing analytics data, removing all PII instances.
- Create a new analytics account with sufficient settings to stop PII data entering analytics
- Migrate existing event, goal and custom tracking, property and view level requirements to the new analytics account. Now would be a good time to fix and improve any other tracking issues at the same time.
- Perform regression and validation. Continue to monitor.

Let us help you

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End