

World Surf League: Riding a wave of digital marketing analytics

To learn more about fan behavior and track viewership, World Surf League combined Google Analytics 360 with Google BigQuery, improving digital marketing effectiveness.

Google Cloud Results

- More than doubles the efficiency of campaigns that drive fan engagement and content viewership
- Increases web/mobile sessions by 31%
- Improves responsiveness and speed of analytics team up to 80%
- Reduces infrastructure costs by 70% during the off season

Increases live event viewership by 30%

Surfing is an ancient practice, but it captured the world's attention in the 1960s, making an indelible mark on music, film, and pop culture. The sport's popularity has only grown since then, and the Championship, Big Wave, and Longboard tours now draw the attention of fans worldwide. The [World Surf League \(WSL\)](#) broadcasts those and other events, streaming live video to television partners and social media.

WSL is a digital-first sports league by design, because no one knows exactly when the wave conditions will be right. Events are planned around a two-week time window at locations around the globe. When the surf is up, the competition begins. Being all-digital allows WSL to publish content fast and stream surfing events as they occur. Using a mobile app, fans can watch live broadcasts and keep up to date with their favorite WSL athletes anywhere, anytime.

After consolidating several live events from major surfing brands onto its own video streaming platform, WSL needed better answers to questions about viewership. How many fans engage regularly? How many tune in to multiple events? Who are the superfans—the ones who drive the majority of consumption and engagement—and which new users are most likely to become superfans?



About World Surf League

The World Surf League (WSL) is dedicated to celebrating the world's best surfing on the world's best waves through a variety of best-in-class audience platforms. Headquartered in Santa Monica, California, WSL is a global sport with regional offices in Australasia, Africa, North America, South America, Hawaii, Japan, and Europe.

Industries: Media & Entertainment
Location: United States



About Analytics Pros

Analytics Pros is a Google Analytics 360 and Google Cloud Reseller delivering business intelligence solutions, focusing on big data and machine learning for World Surf League and other well known brands.

To better understand fan behavior, WSL began using [Google Analytics 360](#) to gather data from a variety of customer touchpoints. WSL worked with [Analytics Pros](#), a Google Analytics and Google Cloud Platform Certified Partner, to accelerate time to value and keep data quality high.

“We tried several analytics tools, but landed on Google Analytics 360 because of its flexibility to track video consumption in a powerful way across all our platforms,” says Christopher Culbertson, VP Marketing at World Surf League. “Other marketing analytics solutions seemed to be designed exclusively for e-commerce sites.”

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—Christopher Culbertson, VP Marketing, World Surf League

Fully managed data analysis

As WSL’s use of Google Analytics 360 expanded, the team began loading data into Google BigQuery, an enterprise data warehouse for analytics that integrates with Google Analytics 360. Because Google BigQuery is fully managed, WSL’s data and analytics team doesn’t need to manage infrastructure. Rather, they began collaborating on higher-value initiatives to pull insights out of their data. Using Google BigQuery to analyze Google Analytics 360 data, the analytics team can provide critical insights about viewership and engagement.

“To deliver the same depth of insight without [Google BigQuery](#), our data and analytics team would need to be three to five times larger,” says Jamie Schallek, Director of Marketing at World Surf League. “But even with a larger team, it would still be difficult to deliver the responsiveness and speed we achieve with our existing lean team using Google BigQuery.”

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—Christopher Culbertson, VP Marketing, WSL

Doubling ad spend efficiency

Getting smarter about fan targeting helps WSL generate a higher return from its marketing budget. Instead of using a scattergun approach, WSL can invest in the viewers who are most likely to stay and establish a lasting relationship with the brand. It measures the efficiency of ad spend in cost per conversion, where each video play or content view on a mobile app or website equals one conversion.

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Increasing viewership by 30%

By focusing on higher ROI customers, WSL drives greater fan engagement with live events and digital content—without increasing its marketing budget. When weather conditions deliver the best waves and large numbers of fans are looking at content, WSL can easily scale its analytics on demand.

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“Moving our infrastructure to Google Cloud Platform has allowed us to scale our use of resources to match traffic to our website, mobile, and connected device apps. During our off season, we reduced infrastructure costs by 70% by scaling our resources down.”

—Rich Robinson, SVP Product, WSL

Reducing off-season costs by 70%

WSL is in the process of moving the rest of its infrastructure to [Google Cloud Platform](#), using [Google Compute Engine](#) and [Google Cloud SQL](#) databases to decrease latency and provide performance and stability during peak traffic times. During the off season between December and March, WSL can easily scale down to operate much more efficiently.

“Moving our infrastructure to Google Cloud Platform has allowed us to scale our use of resources to match the demand of traffic to our website, mobile, and connected device apps,” says Rich Robinson, SVP of Product at World Surf League. “During our off season, we reduced infrastructure costs by 70% by scaling our resources down.”

A transformational toolset

Many WSL employees follow the sun and the waves, using [G Suite](#) apps such as [Gmail](#), [Google Docs](#), [Drive](#), [Sheets](#), [Slides](#), and [Hangouts Meet](#) to stay connected.

“We adopted G Suite as part of our digital transformation, and it’s ingrained in our way of working,” says Rich. “G Suite helps us work collaboratively with Analytics Pros to continually optimize our marketing analytics as new opportunities come along.”

An ocean of possibilities

With a scalable, on-demand analytics engine, WSL can ask more sophisticated questions of its data: How do wave conditions affect viewership? How do athletes’ scores correlate with other factors such as wave height, time of day, or level of competition? And what exactly is a superfan worth to the business?

“Using Google Cloud services and teaming up with Analytics Pros keeps paying off for us in the things that we can do and the speed at which we work,” says Christopher. “Queries come in from across the business and we turn them around in a few hours, sometimes even less.”