



CASE STUDY



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.

www.worldsurfleague.com

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.

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

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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?

To better understand fan behavior, WSL began using Google Analytics 360 to gather data from a variety of customer touchpoints. WSL worked with Adswerve, a Google Analytics and Google Cloud 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.”

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

30%

Adswerve used BigQuery to help WSL increase live event viewership by 30%

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 Analytics 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.”

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.

“As a digital media business, user engagement and consumption in relation to marketing and ad spend directly correlates to return on investment,” says Christopher. “Using Google BigQuery, we drove a 30% increase in concurrent viewers to our live events and a 31% increase in sessions per user to our website and app.”

50%+

Reduction in cost per conversion using Google Analytics 360 and Google Big Query

Reducing Off-Season Costs by 70%

WSL is in the process of moving the rest of its infrastructure to Google Cloud, 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 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.”

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A Transformational Toolset

Many WSL employees follow the sun and the waves, using Google Workspace apps such as Gmail, Google Docs, Drive, Sheets, Slides, and Hangouts Meet to stay connected.

“We adopted Google Workspace as part of our digital transformation, and it’s ingrained in our way of working,” says Rich. “Google Workspace helps us work collaboratively with Adswerve 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 Adswerve 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.”

Adswerve is an award-winning data, media and tech consultancy and a leading Google and Adobe partner that helps 800+ brands and agencies unlock new growth opportunities and get the most ROI from their digital marketing. See how we make your data do more at adswerve.com.

