# CARDINALPATH

# MARKETER'S GUIDE TO FINDING THE RIGHT ANALYTICS SOLUTION

**People are always asking us:**

## Which digital analytics platform should we be using?

They're hoping there is a simple, cut-and-dried method for figuring out whether they should be using the free Google Analytics platform, Google Analytics Premium, Adobe Analytics, IBM Digital Analytics, Webtrends, Piwik, or another tool.

## "But which one is best?"

### We get that a lot, too.

The truth is that none of these tools can simply be ranked from **"best to worst"** – any one of them could be the perfect fit depending on the needs of your organization.

To understand that fit, you must first understand the platforms – what they do and how they can address the needs of your organization, getting your stakeholders the data they need to truly impact your bottom line. In this whitepaper, we'll provide an overview of the major analytics platforms, and drawing from the experience of thousands of client engagements, we'll offer insights into ways you can optimize your solution with the right skills, process, and best practices.

## Google Analytics Standard

Google Analytics Standard has become the most adopted platform out there, and it can be a great solution for many businesses. One very big reason for its popularity is its price: it's free, but keep in mind that you'll very likely have to pay for internal resources or external services in order to get it properly implemented with all of its bells and whistles.

There's a wide base of users out there, which makes it easy for people in your organization to get started and easier for you to hire more.

Another key feature of Google Analytics is that it integrates well with other popular products and services. Google products like AdWords or Search Console (formerly Webmaster Tools) are easily integrated, which means that if you're spending marketing dollars on Google AdWords, you'll be able to see all of your cost and pre-click data right there next to the data being collected by Google Analytics. Additionally, a host of ecommerce, marketing automation, testing, email marketing platforms, and more have all built integrations due to the popularity of Google Analytics. So if you're using just about any of the popular platforms in digital marketing, you'll likely be able to set them up to integrate with Google Analytics as well.

The Standard (free) version of Google Analytics also includes a number of great tools that are built into the product, including:

| Multi-channel funnels | Attribution modeling tool | Remarketing Capabilities |
|---|---|---|

It's used by a huge portion of the online world to measure online performance and even though it's free, it is a very powerful platform with a large community of users. Due to the platform's popularity, there are plenty of resources available, including training.

# Google Analytics Premium (GAP)

Google Analytics Premium provides enterprises with all the same benefits of Google Analytics Standard, but adds a number of limit increases and enterprise-level features, like more flexible access to unsampled data, Roll-up Reporting, Data-Driven Attribution models, fresher data, more integrations with other Google products, access to dedicated support, Service Level Agreements (SLAs), and early access to new features.

**Higher limits:** Standard GA has stated limits of 10 million hits / month / web property, while the first tier of GAP starts at 1 billion hits / month.  GAP has increased View limits per account (these used to be called "Profiles") and up to 200 custom metrics and 200 custom dimensions, while GA Standard allows only 20 of each.

**Sampling** in Google Analytics is the practice of using only a subset of data points instead of a full data set in order to serve up your reports in a timely fashion.  This means that if you're collecting a lot of data, you may find yourself in a situation where the Standard Google Analytics product is producing reports that are heavily sampled and not as useful in helping you make decisions.

> **This report is based on 500,109 sessions (1.14% of sessions).**

Google Analytics Premium has the following advantages over Standard with respect to sampling:

- Sampling will only occur on custom data requests within the UI: no sampling of any standard reports
- Sampling starts at 50 million sessions vs 500,000 for GA Standard
- Unsampled reports can be exported directly from the interface
- Pre-aggregated custom reports can be created to eliminate sampling regardless of the number of sessions
- BigQuery export - hit level data exported automatically to Google's cloud platform that gives you detailed clickstream data that can be merged and used with other enterprise data sets for a variety of applications. (GAP customers receive a $500 per month credit for BigQuery usage)
- Unsampled data may be requested via a Premium-only unsampled report request API

**Data-Driven Attribution** uses data from your Analytics account to generate a custom model for assigning conversion credit to marketing touch points throughout the entire customer journey. Your custom Data-Driven model provides a more complete and actionable view of which digital channels are performing best, so you can make better decisions about where to invest marketing resources. Data-Driven Attribution uses both converting and non-converting paths, along with any imported cost and revenue data to determine channel performance.

### Additional Custom Variables & Dimensions

- 50 Custom Variables are included for GA Classic
- 200 Custom Dimensions and 200 Custom Metrics are included for Universal Analytics

### Doubleclick Integrations

- For advertisers, pre-click, impression, and cost data from Doubleclick Campaign Manager (DCM) and Doubleclick Bid Manager (DBM) as well as having Floodlight tags integrated into Google Analytics reports. You can also create remarketing lists that push back to DBM.
- For publishers, Google Analytics Premium integrates DFP metrics and dimensions to help maximize the impact of the ads you're serving, along with allowing you to create Audience lists to sell more targeted audience segments to your advertisers and increase ad margins.

### Beta Access to New Premium Features

- Customers of Google Analytics Premium often enjoy access to beta programs and new features prior to their full release.

### Service Level Agreement

- Google provides an SLA for both Google Analytics Premium and Google Tag Manager. Customer receive assurances of a 99.9% collection uptime and a 99% interface / reporting availability.  If Google fails to meet these standards, appropriate credits are applied to your account.

## Adobe Analytics (and the Adobe® Marketing Cloud)

Adobe Analytics is another leading solution for enterprise web analytics. Its Ad Hoc Analysis (previously Discover) is a powerful tool that allows a deeper level of segmentation and analysis than is currently available within Google Analytics Premium, unless you export the data through BigQuery and use tools external to Google Analytics.

Adobe Analytics has tools & functions galore. For analysts, Adobe offers some unique features that allow for very precise and different types of information to be analyzed. Their segment builder gives finely tuned control down to the hit level of what information to include, and their calculated metric builder allows for the creation and sharing of advanced metrics on the fly. The platform also includes multiple ways to understand conversion metrics (participation, etc.) for a more nuanced understanding of how pages and campaigns contribute to success on your site.

Adobe Analytics offers a glimpse into the machine learning capabilities you can find in some of the other tools within the Adobe marketing stack: its anomaly detection uses machine learning rules to identify the causes behind recent changes in site behavior. And because an Adobe Analytics user also has access to the Adobe Data Warehouse and (hit level) Data Feeds, there are a variety of alternative ways to access reports and information such as Report Builder.

Adobe Report Builder is an API plugin that enables the connection of Excel spreadsheets directly to Adobe's API. This tool is perfect for creating automated ad hoc data pulls to intricate scorecards that can be updated with the press of a button. It is often a great option for companies looking to automate their dashboarding and reporting but who are not yet ready to make a jump to the next level with a dashboarding tool like Domo.

One notable feature of Adobe Analytics is its Data Connectors feature (formerly known as Genesis). These connections use the Adobe Partner API to integrate with a variety of third party platforms that provide marketers the ability to optimize campaigns and conversion across the multiple digital marketing platforms. The Adobe partner ecosystem currently includes over 75 integrations with paid search, ad serving, email, CRM and many others.

Adobe Analytics provides organizations a path to mature and grow, and leverages the sharing of data and segmentation between different products on its Marketing Cloud. Additional Adobe Marketing Cloud products include:

- **Target:** testing and personalization platform
- **Campaign:** cross-channel campaign management tool
- **Social:** social marketing platform
- **Audience Manager:** data management platform
- **Media Manager:** media optimization solution that helps to forecast and execute a media advertising plan
- **Experience Manager:** content management tool for building websites and mobile apps
- **Prime Time:** video streaming service

## Core Services Connecting the Adobe Marketing Cloud

The Marketing Cloud Core Services are available to anyone who has purchased any of the eight products in the Marketing Cloud. The biggest benefit of Core Services is the ability to transfer information between the different products in the Marketing Cloud. This means you can use information that you've enabled in Adobe Analytics across the other products in the Adobe stack - giving you a single source of truth for data across the Adobe Marketing Cloud.

Adobe is also releasing Audience Marketplace, a way to find and buy second- and third-party data to augment the information you have about your customers.
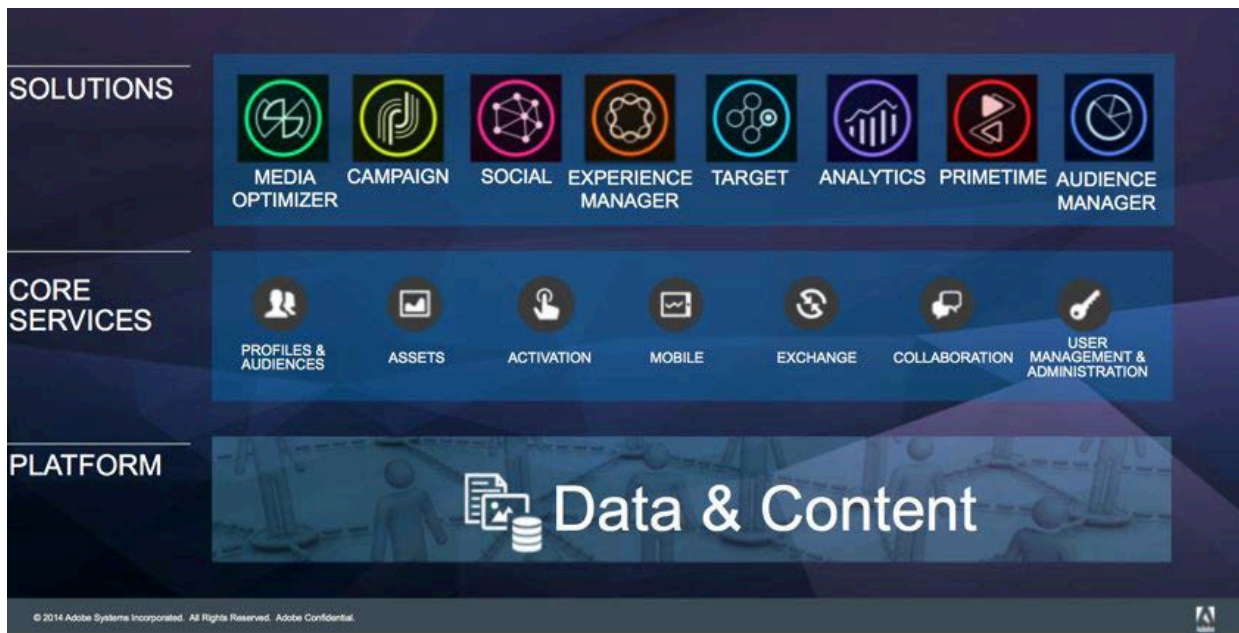


The most used core service is called Activate (formerly Dynamic Tag Management). Through Activate, Adobe Analytics tags and third party tracking can be deployed on the fly, helping to alleviate reliance on IT deployment cycles.

The newly launched Analytics for Target integration pulls all of the Adobe Analytics data into the Target testing and personalization platform. This gives you access to all the metrics you are capturing in Analytics right in the Target dashboard and also lets you push Target data into Analytics for deep dive segmentation. Gone are the days when your analytics tool would report a different set of data than your testing tool.

Adobe's Profiles & Audiences Core Service allows the marketer to create segments within Analytics and then publish them to the Marketing Cloud. Tools like Target can leverage these segments (and also unprocessed data in real-time) for on-site or in-ad personalization and testing. Campaign and Social can use the segments to trigger email or social campaigns for specific subsets of users and Audience Manager can be used to find and serve display media to similar groups that convert through the website.
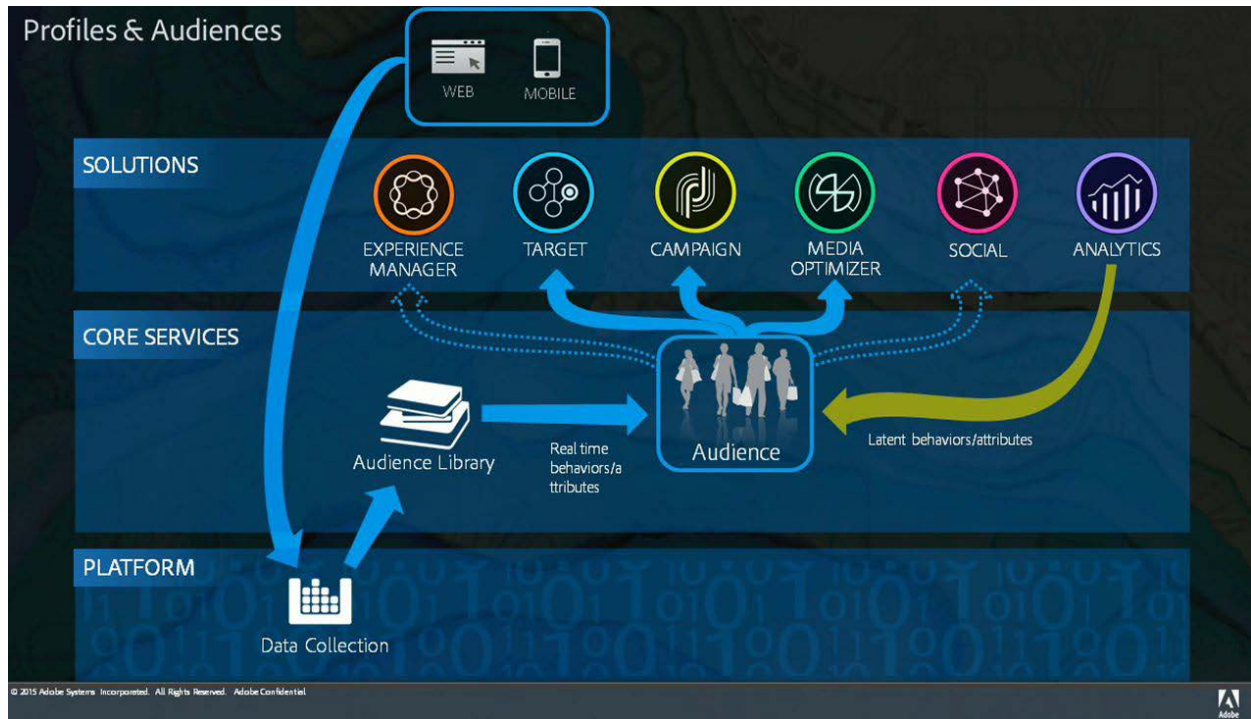


The activation of your Analytics Data across the Marketing Cloud is one of the biggest differentiators for Adobe Analytics. While the tool is a great option as a stand alone feature, the true power is unlocked when it is paired with other solutions in the Marketing Cloud.

## Other Platforms to Consider

While Google and Adobe have the largest share of the analytics platform market, there are also other platforms you may want to consider. IBM Digital Analytics (previously Coremetrics) has been a frontrunner in the retail and ecommerce space for many years. It's now part of IBM's Marketing & Merchandising solutions suite, with several complementary solutions including Silverpop Engage.

Webtrends has grown its analytics suite over the past 20 years and offers a real-time data streaming service which allows for real-time marketing automation, personalization and retargeting. It's got excellent multi-channel integrations (web, social, mobile and a unique SharePoint integration) and a fully integrated platform with analytics, segmentation, search, social, testing, targeting and remarketing. Users may like the intuitive interfaces and impressive dashboarding and data visualizations.

For an open-source alternative, Piwik offers a free tool, plus the option of hosting your data on their cloud.

## Re-deploying your existing Analytics Platform

In many cases, a vendor change may not be necessary. If you're not getting what you need out of your existing analytics platforms, a re-deployment can help you extract the value that you are looking for. Cardinal Path is often called in to help clients assess and audit their analytics systems, and in many cases, a re-deployment may be the right solution. This is particularly true when:

● The analytics solution was originally configured by someone new to, or not familiar with, the platform.  Analytics tools are complicated, and having a deep understanding of how they work is imperative to help ensure a solid implementation that meets business needs.

● KPIs do not align to business objectives so the data being collected is of no real value to the business. Often an organization will rush into deploying a tool and its features without properly assessing the business objectives that should drive the solution design and implementation process. This results in more ad hoc and disconnected data collection that does not address the actual needs of users across the business.

● There is a lack of governance and accountability. If there is no clear ownership of all the moving parts that must work in tandem for a successful data & analytics strategy, then there is certainly no one with a vested interest to ensure the analytics implementation is the best it can be. A "throat to choke" should always be assigned for the key components of digital analytics across the organization, spanning the needs of both the business and technical users.

● There is an overall lack of knowledge around the tool or lack of training in how to leverage it, both from technical and business users.  Educating your users on the tool, what it can and cannot do, how to use it, and the internal processes created to leverage it within the organization are imperative.

# Case study: Adobe Analytics Re-deployment
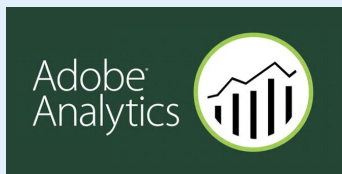
The marketing team of a major nonprofit organization was increasingly frustrated with their inability to derive business value from their investment in the Adobe Analytics platform. Drowning in a vast sea of data, they wanted to start using that data to understand how their marketing programs were performing in order to allocate resources as effectively as possible.

An assessment showed that the platform had been implemented at a very basic level, without adherence to industry best-practices or a consultative approach to their analytics requirements. This resulted in lots of data, but the implementation wasn't producing the right data that was required to answer the organization's needs.

Like every organization, nonprofits have both industry-specific and entity-specific needs that must be considered to ensure the success of any new system. In this case, they were focused on driving donations, awareness, and –ultimately– loyalty, in order to fulfill their mandate.

Working with an experienced analytics team to establish KPIs that aligned to the organization's goals, this nonprofit was able to customize the Adobe Analytics solution to collect the data required to measure those KPIs and meet their needs, delivering the key information to the various decision-makers through user-friendly dashboards.

## Costs and Opportunities when Switching Platforms

Moving from one platform to another can be costly not just in terms of money, but also in the time and resources it can require to complete a proper re-implementation or transition from one tool to another (eg: Google to Adobe or vice-versa). When considering a switch, you need to understand that you'll be investing significant time and effort to do this properly and ensure that you are following best practices. Always remember to include training as part of these costs, and consider the cost of time and salaries for your internal resources that will be required in this process in your calculations.

**Analytics Platform Migration Checklist:**

- ☑ **KPIs:** Transformational business intelligence starts with mapping business objectives to your data. With well-defined key performance indicators (KPIs) in place, you will effectively inform the right framework for your analytics deployment. This will ensure that you are collecting the right data, applying relevant segmentation, uncovering gaps and revealing the insights you're after.

- ☑ **Formal technology selection process:** Successful organizations take the time to lay out their needs and evaluate different platforms and solutions against a formal decision criteria matrix. This process can uncover the specific needs of stakeholders across the organization and map those needs to the different features and characteristics of the different technologies, leading to the best match for your organization.

☑ **Evaluate costs:** You'll not only need to consider the cost of the platform itself, but also ownership costs (IT), training, implementation, staffing, and maintenance, among others. In some cases, you may want to run your legacy platform and your new platform side by side for a period of time to provide baseline data comparisons between the two tools, and this can add extra costs during this time period. Reconciling and understanding the invariable differences between the different data collection and processing approaches between tools should also be built into your budgeting.

☑ **Use this as a catalyst:** A point of change in an analytics platform is also a good time to re-examine and advance your broader data and analytics strategy. It could be the perfect time to put in place a formal data governance plan– a key piece in a successful analytics deployment. You may also consider additional data programs that can be supported by this investment in your current or new platform: is this also a good time to add in data visualizations or dashboarding? A formal testing or personalization program? Integrations with other data sources?

☑ **Skills:** Without the right talent in place to properly leverage data and technology, you won't get very far. This includes implementation resources, experienced analysts, data scientists and data architects. Whether you choose to build these teams internally or find them outside your organization, ultimately, you'll need to ensure that business users across the enterprise are empowered to confidently make decisions based on the data they can access.

## Case study: Google Standard to Google Premium



1stdibs is the world's leading online marketplace for rare and desirable objects. Although 1stdibs was already using Google Analytics to collect and analyze data, the organization knew they were only scratching the surface. For example, the marketing team didn't have a solid attribution strategy for the myriad marketing programs and campaigns that were being run, and as a result, didn't know what it cost to acquire a customer or how effective the programs being deployed across a number of channels were.

After evaluating a number of alternatives, they decided to do a complete re-implementation of Google Analytics, leveraging the full feature set of Universal Analytics and extending their capabilities with Google Analytics Premium.

❝Essentially, now that we've gone through a business-objective planning process and implemented the advanced features of the tool, not only do we trust the data we're seeing, we're able to identify and benchmark our acquisition costs - even across different segments - and determine how we're going to get the best return from our media planning. That's power we've never had before.❞

**Anna Ivnitskaya,**
Manager of Analytics1stdibs

**Read the full case study**

Cardinal Path has performed re-deployments and migrations in many directions, and though a properly deployed Google Analytics implementation can be migrated to Adobe Analytics well (and vice versa), organizations typically want to use this opportunity to update or improve their data and analytics strategy to cover new business directions, or to take advantage of features that previously were unavailable in the other platform. All of this needs to be considered in your migration planning. In many cases, it is almost like starting with a blank canvas armed with a fresh look at what you'll need to do and lessons from previous experiences. Considering the alternative –becoming a digital laggard and missing out on the many benefits of a robust analytics solution– a project that will have such a big impact on your business is well worth the effort.

## Loss of Historical Data

When switching platforms, one very big concern is that you may lose access to all of your historical data.  There are some tricks you can employ to ease this:

- **Migrating to Google Analytics (Standard or Premium) from another platform.**
  Install Google Analytics Standard edition (free) early in the process, and let it collect data for a period of time so that you build up your historical data. Ask your vendor if there are options to pay to maintain access to your reporting for a period of time.

- **Migrating from Google Analytics Premium to another platform.**
  Reduce your Google Analytics Premium account to a standard version (free) and continue to let it run so you can build baseline data against your new platform implementation, and maintain access to your historical data.  Processing times may increase, and while downgrading means you'll forfeit the benefits of Premium, at least you'll have access to all your historic data. And, if you've taken advantage of the BigQuery export during your use of GA Premium, all of that historical data will remain there. You'll continue to have deep, hit level access to that data, though you will forfeit the $500 monthly credit.

- **Migrating from Adobe to another platform**
  You won't be able to take your Adobe data with you so you'll want to make sure you have some of the key metrics pulled out of the system. We don't recommend taking everything, but high level metrics like visits, visitors, your KPIs and perhaps traffic to pages or site sections are good to back up.

- **Migrating from another platform to Adobe**

  If possible, install Adobe prior to sunsetting your existing platform in order to build historical data while both tools are running. Adobe will process your metrics differently than your current tool, so expect some basic metrics like visits and unique visitors to change once you migrate your reporting. Having both tools running at the same time can help you understand what these differences will be.

- **Migrating from Google Analytics Standard to Google Analytics Premium**

  You've got nothing to worry about! There is no loss of historical data in this case. The activation of Google Analytics Premium is a flick of a switch on your existing Google Analytics web properties to upgrade them and enable access to GA Premium features.

- **Integrations**

  When migrating to different platforms, any data integrations (to other data sets or digital marketing tools and platforms) will need to be re-done and validated.  Be aware that the integration process can be quite different between the platforms, and integrations that may have been supported in your legacy tool may not be available or may be very different for your new platform.

- **Dashboards and Reports**

  Note that any dashboards or customized reports you generate from your current platform will all need to be recreated. If these are used for reporting against specific targets, you will likely need to set some baseline data and train users on the new reports as the they will typically not be exactly the same across platforms for the same metrics.

## Determining the Value of a Platform

Value should be determined by the insights and actions that are driven by your analytics platform.  A good analytics tool should improve your ability to generate insights that support business objectives, drive revenue or create savings for your organization, and the value of this should outweigh the costs of the platform. Those costs should be calculated as in any other investment, and should include ancillary costs, such as the salaries of those who use the tool.  Unless you are implementing a tool with a high level of automation and machine learning, the costs of the platform itself should not outstrip the costs of those people (including the agencies) servicing the platform and extracting value.

We've often seen organizations that have invested heavily in tools only to realize they haven't saved budget for resources who can use those tools, and so there is little value gained from the investment. A more balanced approach (such as the one outlined in the **Online Analytics Maturity Model**) needs to be considered to ensure you are maximizing the value from your investments.

# Conclusion:

Selecting a provider for data and analytics technology and services is one of the most important items Cardinal Path can be tasked with on behalf of our clients. Accessible, trustworthy data can build confidence throughout an organization and help empower individuals to tackle challenging business questions. Conversely, inaccurate, untrusted, and inaccessible data can cause inaction and friction within an organization. Which platform is right for you will depend on your business requirements, business goals and your organization's appetite for setting and sticking to a long-term marketing and data strategy.

On the winding road to digital maturity, the analytics platform you are using plays a big role in extending your digital data intelligence from knowing what happened, to knowing what will happen, and what you should do about it. It's worth getting it right so you can grow your reliance on data for business decision-making for many years to come.

Mapping KPIs to your business objectives and getting governance and analytics skillsets ramped up are critical steps alongside selecting, deploying (or re-deploying), and optimizing your analytics platform. Ultimately, this process leads to a platform that works the way you need it to so you can not just collect the data you need, but also trust it, learn from it, and take actions upon it that will benefit the business.

**Create a competitive advantage with analytics. Contact us today:**

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Cardinal Path is a premier digital data analytics firm that works with the world's most prominent organizations to create, implement and action advanced analytics. Named **Most Influential Agency/Vendor of the Year** by the Digital Analytics Association in 2015, Cardinal Path is known for its industry leadership and for tools such as the Online Analytics Maturity Model, a framework for assessing enterprise-wide analytics maturity. With dedicated teams of award-winning analysts, statisticians, data scientists, developers, and many of the top minds in the digital marketing space, we help our clients unlock the value of their data, sharing all that we know and empowering people to make confident business decisions for sustainable growth.