Solving the data mismatch between Google Ads and Analytics

Increase the quality of your data and improve reporting accuracy by minimising the common discrepancies between Google Ads and Analytics.

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Who are we?

Ruler Analytics is a visitor level multi-touch marketing attribution product for forms, phone calls and live chat, evidencing every step a visitor makes in their journey and matching revenue back to the source.

By automatically integrating with your CRM, analytics and other products, Ruler 'closes the loop' between leads and revenue. Ruler Analytics call tracking and multi-touch marketing attribution technology enables organisations to attribute revenue to their marketing activity and understand the steps customers make in the decision making process.

By closing the loop between sales revenue and marketing activity, Ruler's platform provides a single point of truth to identify which campaigns are driving revenue, allowing organisations to make meaningful decisions to optimise marketing spend. With 1,000+ integrations with the world's leading applications, Ruler Analytics can sync data back to Google Analytics, your CRM or paid media solutions to give insight where you need it most.

Introduction

Marketers have long struggled to accurately match conversion and click metrics in Google Ads against data in Google Analytics as both platforms track performance differently.

For this guide, we'll show you the most common causes of data discrepancies and share ways on how to minimise their frequency so you can make smarter decisions and improve the quality of your data and reporting accuracy.

Data discrepancies are common, but frustrating

When comparing Google Ads and Analytics data, you must first recognise that minor discrepancies are common and often nothing to worry about. Reporting tools such as Google Ads and Analytics measure campaign performance differently, so, inevitably, your numbers won't match completely.

That said, large data discrepancies aren't normal, and if left unsolved, can lead you to invalid assumptions about the performance of your advertising campaigns.

Discrepancies between Google Ads and Analytics

When you understand the common causes of data discrepancies, you can take action to refine the quality of your reporting and gain better insights to improve bottom-line activity. Generally speaking, the data mismatch between Google Ads and Analytics are often due to the following reasons:

- Improper configuration between your Google Ads and Analytics
- Differences between click and session metrics
- Issues related to URL tagging and tracking codes
- Google Ads and Analytics conversion tracking differences

Let's take a closer look at these common causes of data inconsistencies in Google Ads and Analytics.

"Discrepancies in data reporting falls somewhere between 10-15%."

Source: infotrust

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Improper configuration between your Google Ads and Analytics accounts

Many data discrepancies are due to incorrect (or absent) configuration between your Google Ads and Analytics accounts. Integration between Google Ads and Analytics is key to ensuring that you have accurate and complete data to make smarter decisions on campaign effectiveness.

Google Ads account not linked to Analytics

Linking your Google Ads account to your Google Analytics allows you to track the impact of ad content on user behaviour. Google Analytics offers more insight than Google Ads, such as which actions a user made on your website after clicking on an ad. That alone is enough reason to warrant the connection between the platforms.

Now, back to the matter at hand. If your Google Ads account isn't connected to your Google Analytics, there's a higher likelihood that your paid traffic goes reported as organic. The wrong attribution of traffic sources can be a problem, especially for advertisers who are bidding on expensive keywords and have a lot to prove.

Linking your Google Ad and Analytics accounts can significantly reduce the data discrepancies between both platforms and give your team a better understanding of how each ad campaign impacts the customer journey.

Wrong Google Ads account linked to Analytics

If you're an agency or someone who manages multiple PPC campaigns, then it's likely that you have access to various ad accounts. Under those circumstances, you're more likely to accidentally link the wrong ad account to your Google Analytics property.

it sounds a bit obvious, but it can happen, especially if you're a full-service agency that manages multiple Google Ad accounts on behalf of clients. So, if you're experiencing some data mismatch, checking you've linked the right Google Ads account to Google Analytics is a good place to start.

Multiple Google Ads accounts linked to Google Analytics

You may have numerous departments within your company that share a single website and Google Analytics account but have separate ad accounts for specific billing purposes.

Having multiple Google Ads accounts can cause a bit of a maintenance burden and inevitably lead to data inconsistencies within Google Analytics.

Whenever possible, you should avoid linking multiple Google Ads to your Google Analytics property.

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Differences between click and session metrics

Being native platforms, you'd expect Google Ads and Analytics to report the same results, but that's far from the truth. One of the biggest hurdles advertisers face is matching up the number of clicks in Google Ads with data in Google Analytics. With a greater understanding of click discrepancies, you can develop strategies to help minimise or overcome them.

Google Analytics sessions and Google Ad clicks aren't the same

if you've ever compared clicks from your Google ads account with sessions stored in Google Analytics, you might have noticed that the numbers don't match.

That's because "Clicks" in Google Ads and "Sessions" in Google Analytics are essentially separate metrics and are measured differently. Clicks are defined by how many times your ad was clicked by your users, whereas a session records an accumulation of user interactions on your website that take place within a specific time frame.

By understanding how clicks and sessions are recorded, you can take full control of your data and make appropriate assumptions about your advertising performance.

Users click on the same ad multiple times

It's not uncommon for a user to click on one of your ads multiple times, especially if they're engaged in online shopping. If, for some reason, a user clicks on your ad twice within a 30-minute session, Google Ads would report those interactions as two separate clicks, whereas Google Analytics would only show one session.

There is little that can fix this, as the situation is essentially out of your control. With that said, by viewing click data in each platform separately, you create a more cohesive understanding of your advertising performance and build a hypothesis around which ads encourage the most repeat interactions.

Google Analytics can't filter invalid clicks

If you've managed PPC campaigns for some time, then you've likely heard of click fraud. In the event of that happening, Google Ads will determine clicks and conversions as invalid and automatically remove them from your reports.

Unfortunately, Google Analytics can't filter out invalid sessions resulted from fraudulent click activity. With that in mind, many advertisers have turned to click fraud protection software to hinder competitors, bots and users from excessively clicking on ad content.

Problems related to URL tagging and tracking

Many data discrepancies arise because of issues relating to tracking codes. The problem could be as simple as a missing tracking code on your landing page or something a little more complex such as a client-side malfunction preventing the tracking code from being deployed.

Auto-tagging and/or manual tagging set up incorrectly

You will have access to auto-tagging if your Google Ads account is linked to your Analytics. In its most basic form, auto-tagging automatically adds parameters to your URLs to help measure ad performance and conversion data in Analytics.

If you disable auto-tagging and forget to add manual tags to your URLs, all visitors, including those from Google Ads, will be specified as "organic" in Analytics.

Also, in some instances, you may have to use manual and auto-tagging. Medium and source variables in Google Analytics are case sensitive, and by default, tracks Google paid as "google/cpc". If you have used different medium and source variables on your manual tags, then there's a strong possibility that you're seeing duplicate entries in Analytics due to imcorrect configuration.

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Google Analytics tracking code missing or doesn't fire

If the Analytics tracking code is improperly configured on the landing page or doesn't fire, Google Analytics will fail to record the session.

Also, it's not uncommon for marketers to forget to remove the hardcoded GA tracking code from the website whenever they migrate over to GTM. Whenever this happens, the tracking code is duplicated on each landing page, and every Google ad click can lead to two sessions in Google Analytics.

Google Click ID removed because of redirects

Google adds a GCLID parameter to your URL every time a user clicks on your ads. A website that redirects from one URL to another can lose its GCLID tracking code, creating a problem for advertisers measuring pay-per-click performance in both Google Ads and Analytics.

In addition to this, if the tracking code on the landing page is invalid, then Google Analytics will fail to record the GCLID value. To prevent this, you must take great care to ensure that the Google Analytics code is installed correctly on your website.

Differences between Google Ads and Analytics conversion tracking

Attribution and conversion discrepancies between Google Ads and Analytics are expected as both platforms measure performance differently. By understanding some possible causes, you can take effective steps to improve your data accuracy and make smarter decisions to boost your conversion rates.

Google Ads and Analytics use different attribution models

Google Ads and Analytics essentially use different attribution models. By default, Google Analytics uses the "last-click attribution" model. Meaning, 100% of the credit is awarded to the last source a user clicked on before converting into a lead. Google Ads, however, uses the "last Google Ads click attribution" model, which is slightly different as the credit is attributed to the last Google Ads click in the conversion path. For example, if a user clicked on one of your Google ads and then returned the following day using an organic search, Google Ads would attribute 100% of the credit to the advertisement. On the flip side, Analytics would allocate 100% credit to organic search.

To make matters worse, the attribution window in Google Ads and Analytics only goes up to 90-days and is a huge problem for B2B advertisers that have higher sales values and longer sales cycles. Without complete visibility into the sales cycles, marketers are making budgetary decisions based on unreliable data and missing out on key opportunities.

Google Analytics doesn't support call conversion tracking

Call conversion tracking is only supported in Google Ads and is not currently available in Analytics. As you can imagine, this a notable challenge for advertisers who are using Google Ads to drive more offline interactions.

In addition to this, unlike Google Ads, Analytics can't track the following conversion types, cross-account conversions, view-through conversions and store visit conversions.

Differences in conversion tracking between Google Ads and Analytics

Each goal in Analytics can only be counted once per session, whereas Google Ads has no concept of "sessions" and will count multiple conversions in a given time period.

For example, if a user makes a conversion twice in one session, Analytics will acknowledge this as just one conversion. However, if your counting preference in Google Ads is set to "Every", the platform will consider this as two conversions.

Quick tips to reduce the discrepancies

01
Ensure your Google Ads and Analytics accounts are linked

First and foremost, make sure that the correct Google Ads account is linked to your Analytics property. Whenever possible, avoid connecting multiple ad accounts to ensure data is accurate.

02
Include both click and session metrics in your reports

Include both Google Ad clicks and Google Analytics session metrics in your reports. Explain to your clients and company executives that Google Ads and Google Analytics report clicks and sessions "differently".

03
Check the tracking code is on the landing page and firing

Ensure the Analytics code is firing on the website. Use website crawlers to identify any missing or broken Analytics codes. Also, implementing Google Tag Manager can help you manage all your tracking codes in one place to support data accuracy.

04
Update final URL destinations in Ads to prevent redirects

Prevent redirects by ensuring your ads lead to the final destination. Also, whenever possible, avoid using both manual and auto-tagging at the same time to avoid multiple and duplicate entries in Google Analytics.

05
Use offline attribution to track calls conversions in Ads and Analytics

If you consider phone calls as one of your most valuable conversion types, then using a call attribution solution can provide a single source of truth on which ads are driving the most valuable conversations.

Is there a reliable method to reduce the discrepancies once and for all?

The techniques we've discussed can help minimise the data discrepancies between Google Ads and Analytics, but they don't necessarily resolve them.

Having multiple systems that capture and analyse your data can have serious consequences on your reporting. Without a single source of the truth, marketing teams become misaligned. They focus on the wrong activities as a result of pursuing low-value actions.

To close the gap between Google Ads and Analytics, you need a solution that can provide a single source of truth to reveal what's working and determine which efforts deserve credit.
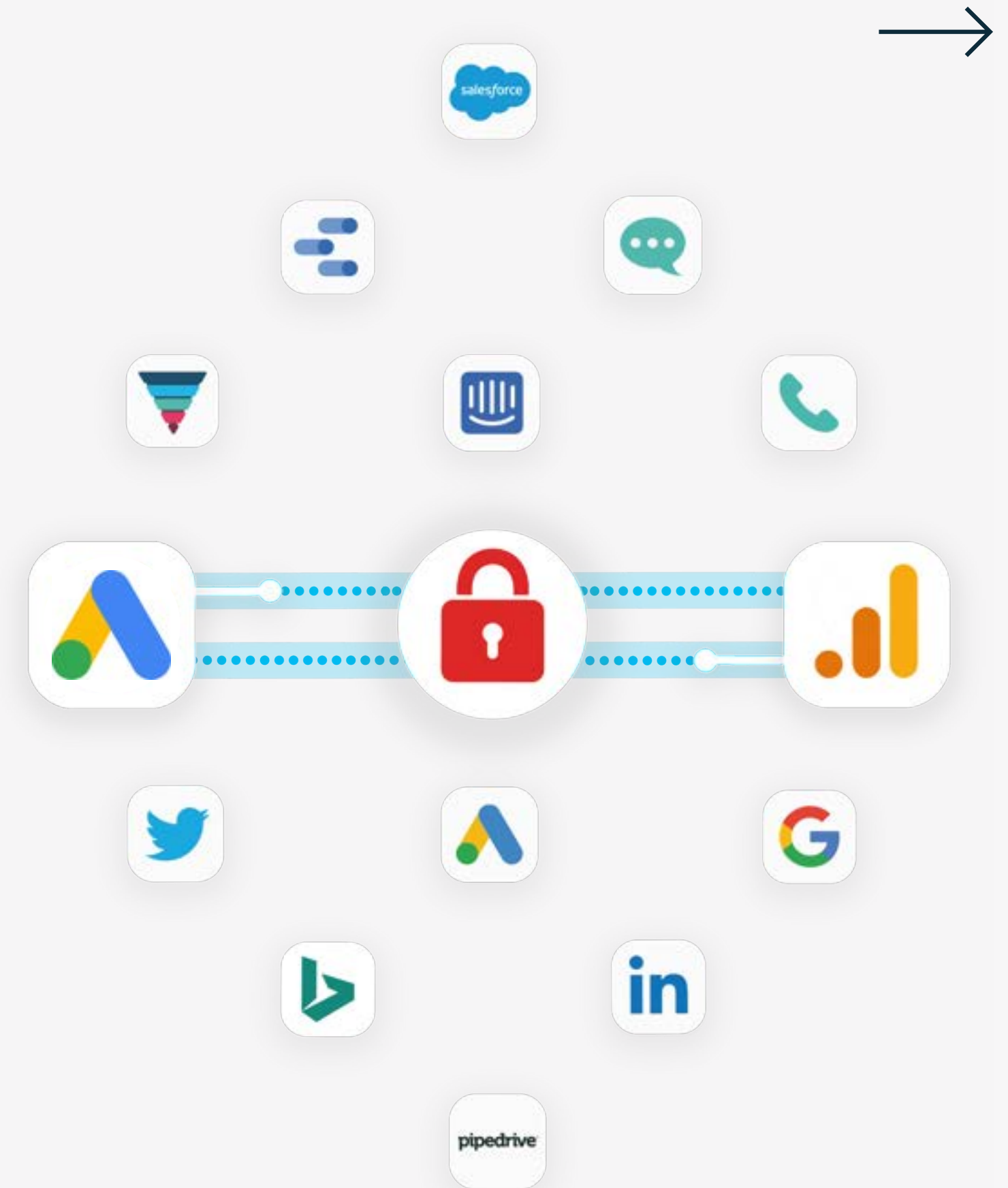
How to solve the disconnect between Google Ads and Analytics

Unified data provides a more complete and accurate view of your performance, but unifying data from different tools is far from easy. To solve the disconnect between Google Ads and Analytics, you need a solution that can:

01   **Capture all interactions throughout an individual customer journey, such as the first and last-click source.**

02   **Attribute revenue back to your Google Ads, Analytics and can support long and complex sales journeys.**

03   **Track all conversion activity and identify which of your marketing initiatives are driving leads and revenue.**

02   **Integrate with Google Ads along with other data sources such as your CRM and Google Analytics to gain visibility of the conversion path.**

Closed-loop reporting with Ruler Analytics

Ruler is a closed-loop multi-channel attribution tool that helps you definitively prove your marketing ROI. It enables you to connect all of your marketing efforts directly to revenue.

Ruler Analytics does this by identifying your website users and tracks their unique journey over multiple touchpoints. Once an anonymous visitor converts into a lead, Ruler Analytics matches the user's details to their marketing touchpoints and sends all this data to your CRM.

This populates the sales team's system with conversion and marketing data, which helps them learn more about each prospect before reaching out to them. Then, when a lead closes into revenue, the sales data is sent back into the Ruler Analytics dashboard. You can integrate this with Google Ads, Google Analytics and more so that you can measure marketing ROI straight from your favourite reporting tools.
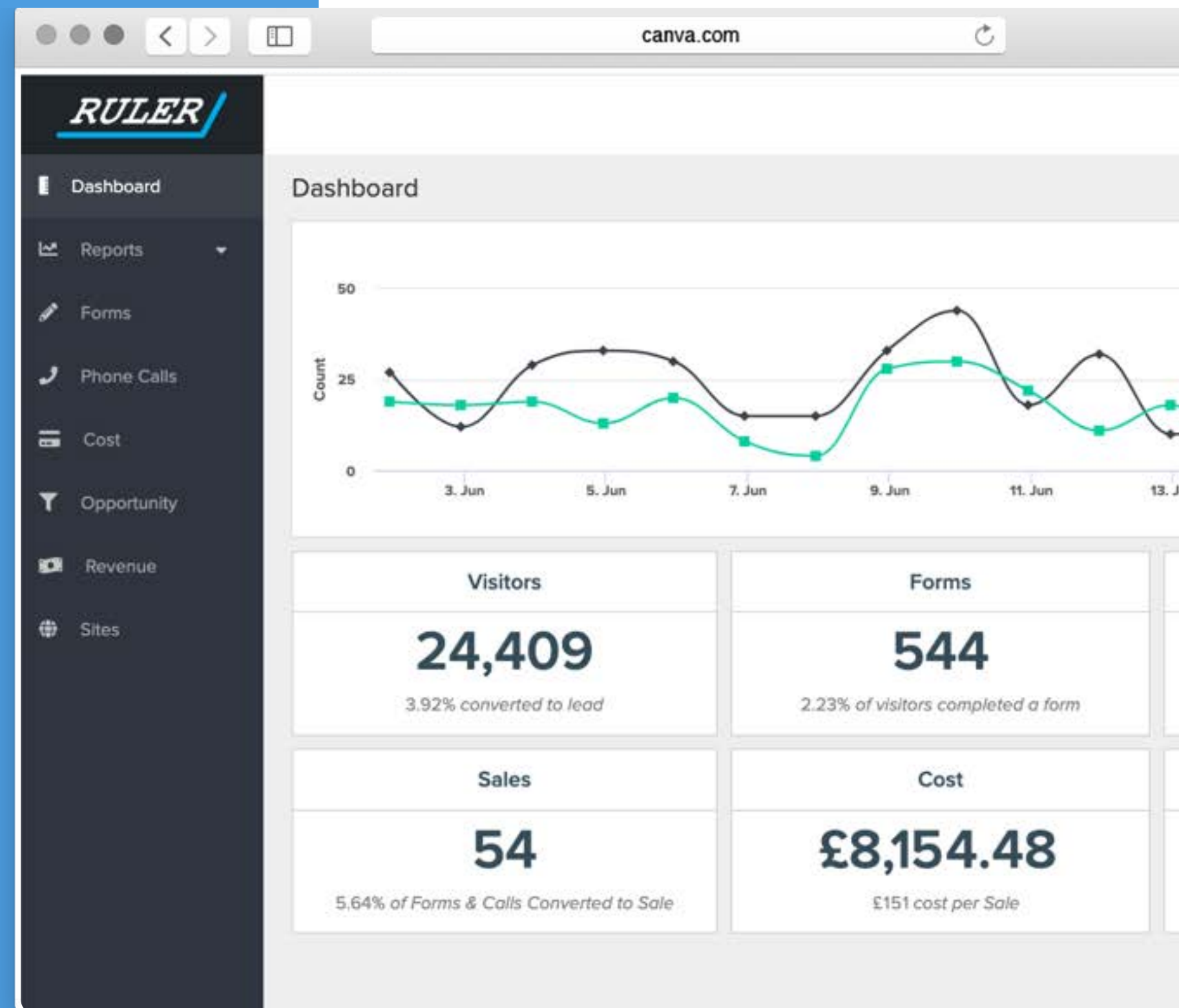
How Ruler's closed loop works
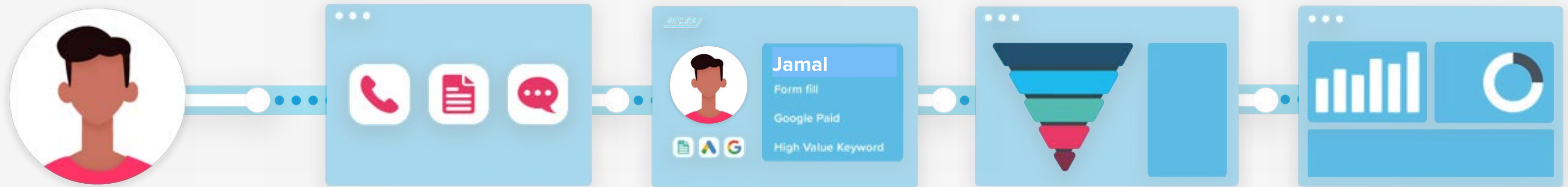
01

Discovery

Anonymous visitor clicks an ad and lands on the website. Ruler captures GCLID via Javascript.

02

Engagement

User enquiries via form fill, live chat or phone call. Ruler matches marketing data to conversion details and pushes lead data to Google Ads and Analytics.

03

Lead

User converts to a lead and details passed to CRM. Ruler enriches CRM entry with marketing variables.
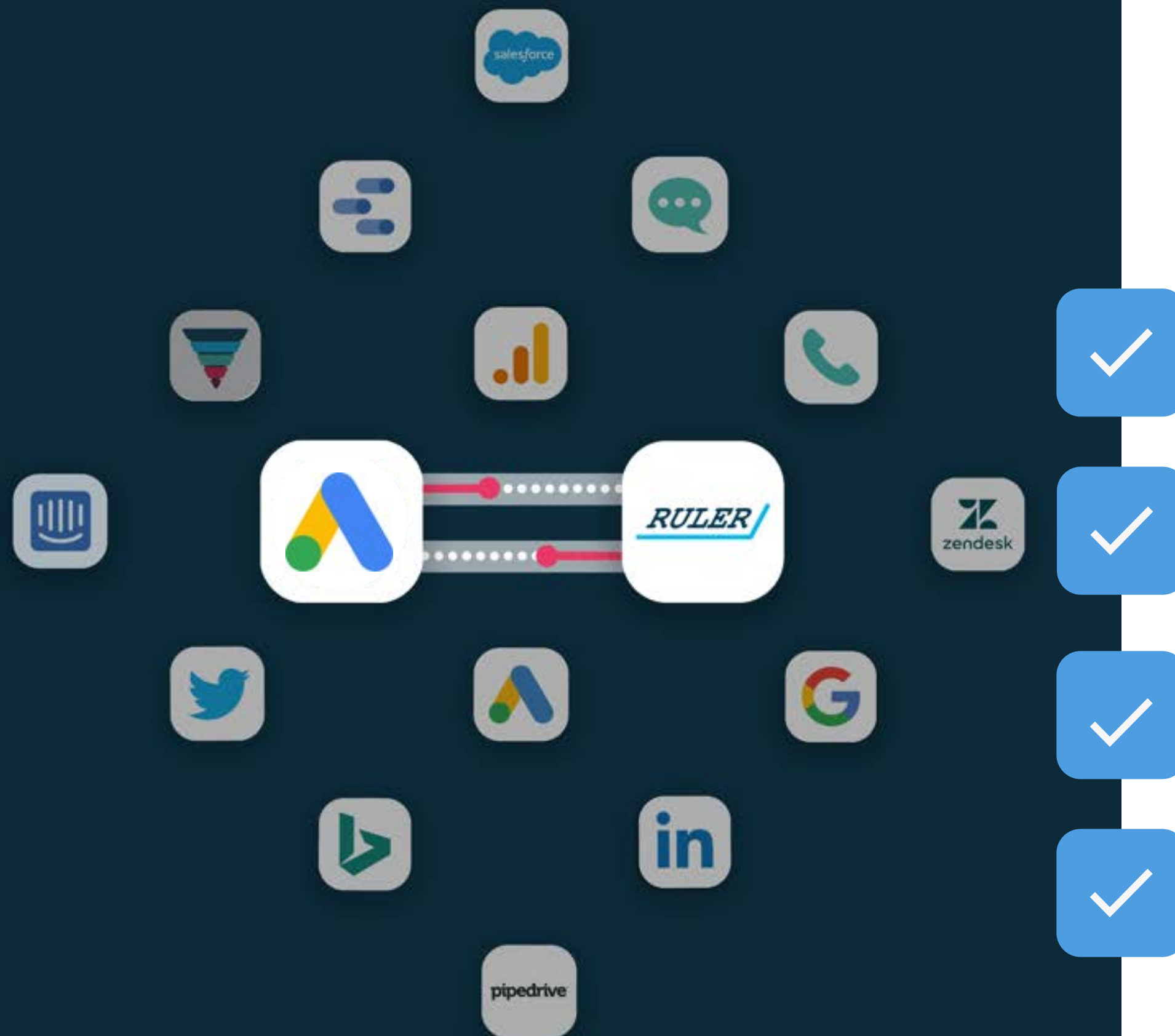
04

Opportunity

Lead works through the CRM pipeline. Ruler pulls opportunity data, including stage and forecasted value, and sends it to Google Ads and Analytics.

05

Closed Deal

Lead converts as a customer. Ruler pulls revenue value from CRM and sends it to Google Ads and Analytics.

What Ruler can do

Ruler can help solve the data gap between your sales and marketing. We can:

Track form fills, phone calls and live chat

Track form submissions, phone calls and live chat, match them to the marketing channel, campaign and keywords which drove the lead.

Enrich your CRM with marketing source data

Enrich your CRM with first-click and last-click marketing source variables tracked to individual visitors interactions.

Solve the disconnect between Google Ads and Analytics

Go beyond basic conversion tracking in Google Ads and Analytics to attribute revenue directly to your advertising efforts.

Integrate with over 1000+ platforms

Ruler can also integrate with over 1000+ other platforms including Google Ads, Google Analytics, Salesforce and more. In addition to this, Ruler can also pass marketing data to the products you use every day via native integrations, Webhook and SQL.

How Croner used Ruler Analytics to get data visibility

Croner offers HR, employment law and health & safety management advice, consultancy and software. Croner uses offline sales techniques to convert leads into customers. They field large quantities of phone calls, form submissions and live chat sessions. Tracking these calls, and understanding the impact of online digital marketing on lead generation, and offline sales, was a problem Croner struggled to solve independently.

"Ruler Analytics has allowed us to make more informed decisions about our marketing. We now know which campaigns and which keywords are bringing the most revenue. We can use real ROAS to move our budget into the campaigns that work, so our impact is growing. Particularly for our PPC adverts, it's saved a lot of wasted budget. With Ruler, we have been able to identify the exact keywords that are resulting in enquiries. It's meant that our PPC ROAS has skyrocketed."

" We spend a considerable amount of budget on channels like PPC but we were assuming where those leads were coming from. I wanted to be sure we knew the real ROAS.

We were essentially throwing money at the wall and seeing what stuck before we began using Ruler's marketing analytics tool. By using the solution, we were able to identify that 26% of revenue was attributed to Google Ad spend. That data was invisible to us before, so we didn't have true oversight of what was working for us.

James Dillon, Digital Marketing Manager, Croner "

How can Ruler Analytics help you?

When it comes to the discrepancies between Google Ads and Analytics, you need to accept that both platforms are complementary tools working together to provide a better understanding of your marketing performance.

And, with a tool like Ruler Analytics, you can go beyond vanity metrics in Google Ads and Analytics such as sessions and clicks to attribute revenue directly to your advertising efforts.

Ruler tracks website visitors over multiple touchpoints and connects the dots once a visitor converts to a lead via form completion, call or live chat conversation.

Whether you report via Google Data Studio, Analytics or Facebook Advertising, Ruler's flexible integration options can push data to where you need it most, helping you analyse data cross-channel to get a true understanding of your most valuable customers and optimise campaigns to drive even more return.

Want to find out more?

Book a demo with Ruler's attribution experts today at
www.ruleranalytics.com