

How to track campaigns in Google Analytics 4

Traffic coming from ad campaigns, social networks, search engines and other sources can be found within analytics reports as campaigns and traffic sources. To analyse these reports effectively, such as understanding whether your launch campaign is performing better on search or social, campaign traffic has to arrive with tags and parameters that signal to Google Analytics how these need to be grouped.

```
http://www.example.com/?utm_source=exampleblog&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=summer-sale
```

```
http://www.example.com/?utm_source=newsletter1&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=summer-sale
```

```
http://www.example.com/?utm_source=newsletter1&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=summer-sale&utm_content=toplink
```

Parameters can be added to campaigns either manually or automatically, the latter is recommended for ad platforms where available. Without campaign tags or parameters, all traffic will instead appear under organic, referral, direct or unknown sources.

Tracking of channel performance has had a significant makeover in Google Analytics 4. Whilst the new setup brings a more granular view of marketing channels and improved tracking capabilities, it is less flexible and requires stricter adherence.

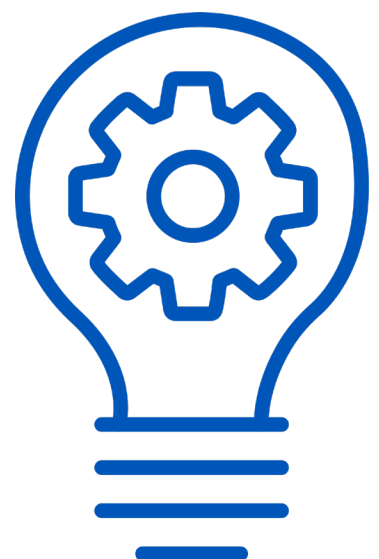
This guide summarises how Google Analytics 4 (GA4) tracks campaigns, and how it differs from the campaign tracking we're used to in Universal Analytics (UA). Google is still rolling out updates to GA4 so this setup may change later on.

Recommended approach

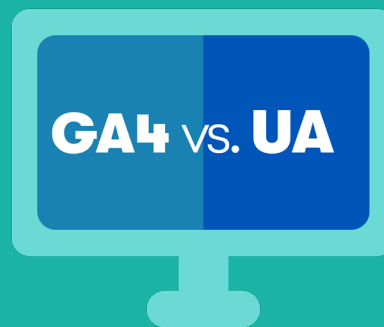
With Google taking a stricter approach to traffic categorisation in GA4, you'll need to adjust your campaign tagging approach to see whether your traffic still sits within the correct channels.

To prepare your campaign tracking for GA4, we recommend the following:

- Since you can't customise channels in GA4 to include your existing campaign tagging parameters, you must map out your parameters against GA4's specified parameters to identify what you need to use to fit the existing channel grouping rules.
- Review your marketing tagging strategy, and implement a process that employs consistent campaign tagging parameters. You need a strict approach to using GA4 specific parameters for all campaign links.
- Integrate with other marketing products where possible to make use of auto tagging and unlock reporting features that are available with auto-tagged campaigns. This will minimise maintenance and errors caused by manual tagging.
- [Review Google's internal list of default-channel grouping sources and categories](#) to confirm that your advertising sites are included in the existing definitions.
- If there are any search, social, video or shopping sites you'd like adding to their internal list, let Google know at googleanalytics-channelgrouprequests@google.com.



Overview of differences



There are a few crucial differences in how ad traffic is tracked in GA4 and UA. Here's a summary of what you need to know.

	GA4	UA
Case sensitive campaign parameters	No	Yes, when manually tagging campaign links, use lowercase parameters
Starting a new session	When GA4 encounters traffic arriving with a new campaign or traffic source, it doesn't start a new session	Traffic with a new campaign or traffic sources starts a new session
Campaign traffic parameters	<p>10 parameters available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source to identify session origin • Medium to identify how sessions reached the site • Campaign to capture the name of the referring campaign • Content to differentiate creatives • ID to connect campaign cost data with analytics campaign data • Campaign ID to identify a specific product promotion or strategic campaign • Source platform to identify referring platform • Term to capture paid keywords • Creative format to capture creative type • Marketing tactic to identify targeting criteria 	<p>5 parameters available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source to identify session origin • Medium to identify how sessions reached the site • Keyword to specify campaign keyword • Campaign to capture the name of the referring campaign • Content to differentiate creatives
Default channel definitions	<p>20 channel groupings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • Cross-network • Paid Shopping • Paid Search • Paid Social • Paid Video • Paid Other • Display • Organic Shopping • Organic Social • Organic Video • Organic Search • Email • Affiliates • Referral • Audio • SMS • Mobile Push Notifications • Other • Unassigned <p>Full details are available online</p>	<p>10 channel groupings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct • Organic Search • Social • Email • Affiliates • Referral • Paid Search • Other Advertising • Display • Other or unavailable <p>Full details are available online</p>

Overview of differences (cont.)

	GA4	UA
Custom channel groups	<p>No, you are currently not able to modify default definitions or add custom channel groups within GA4</p> <p>You can set up BigQuery to create custom channel groups</p>	<p>Yes, you can edit default definitions or add custom ones</p>
Auto and manual tagging	<p>Auto tagging is available and you can't modify automatically tagged parameters with manual campaign parameters</p> <p>Manual tags have to adhere to Google's list of channel definitions to avoid them being grouped in Unassigned channel (equivalent to Other channel in UA)</p>	<p>Both are available</p> <p>Auto-tagging can be overridden with manual campaign parameters by updating UA property settings</p>
Brand vs generic performance	<p>Not available</p> <p>You can set up Explore report to report on these or BigQuery integration to create custom channel definitions</p>	<p>You can edit default channel or add custom channel definitions to split brand vs generic campaign data</p>
Attribution	<p>Default attribution model is data-driven, which is available in all GA properties</p>	<p>Default attribution model is last non-direct click</p> <p>Data-driven attribution is available to 360 customers only</p>
Lookback window	<p>For Acquisition conversion events (first visit or first time opening an app), the default lookback window is 30 days. You can switch to 7 days if you have different attribution needs.</p> <p>For all other conversion events, the default lookback window is 90 days. You can also choose 30 days or 60 days.</p>	<p>The default lookback window is 30 days, which you can extend to 90 days. Only impressions and clicks within this period are credited.</p>

Channel definitions

Channel definitions reflect how Google views what makes up each channel, and what needs to be in place across campaign parameters for ad traffic to be grouped in a specified channel group. These may change as the market evolves and can't be edited at the time of writing this guide.

Definitions marked in orange match between GA4 and UA, whilst definitions in pink are new in GA4.

Channel name	GA4 channel definition	UA channel definition
Direct	Source is set as "direct" and medium is either "(not set)" or "(none)"	Source is set as "direct" and medium is either "(not set)" or "(none)"
Cross-network	Campaign name contains "cross-network" anywhere in the parameter. This channel includes Performance Max and Smart Shopping campaigns.	No default definition for this channel
Paid Shopping	Campaigns are classified as "Paid Shopping" when: 1. Source parameter is one of the recognised shopping sites on Google's internal list, or 2. Campaign name contains "shop" or "shopping" with medium set as "ppc", "paid", or any other identifier that contains "cp"	No default definition for this channel
Paid Search	Campaigns are classified under "Paid Search" when source parameter is one of the recognised search sites on Google's internal list with medium set as "ppc", "paid", or any other identifier that contains "cp"	No default definition for this channel
Paid Video	Campaigns are classified under "Paid Video" when source parameter is one of the recognised video sites on Google's internal list with medium set as "ppc", "paid", or any other identifier that contains "cp"	No default definition for this channel
Display	Medium is either "display", "cpm", "banner", "expandable" or "interstitial"	Medium is either "display", "cpm" or "banner", or when Ad Distribution Network parameter is set as "Content"
Organic Shopping	Campaigns are classified as "Organic Shopping" when: Source parameter is one of the recognised shopping sites on Google's internal list, or Campaign name contains "shop" or "shopping"	No default definition for this channel



Channel definitions (cont.)

Channel name	GA4 channel definition	UA channel definition
Organic Social	Campaigns are classified under "Organic Social" when: 1. Source parameter is one the recognised social sites on Google's internal list, or 2. Medium is set as "social", "social-network", "social-media", "sm", "social network", "social media"	No default definition for this channel
Organic Video	Campaigns are classified as "Organic Video" when: 1. Source parameter is one of the recognised video sites on Google's internal list, or 2. Medium contains "video" anywhere in the parameter	No default definition for this channel
Organic Search	Campaigns are classified as "Organic Search" when: 1. Source parameter is one of the recognised search sites on Google's internal list, or 2. Medium is set as "organic"	Medium is set as "organic"
Email	Campaigns are classified as "Email" when either Source or Medium is set as "email", "e-mail", "e_mail" or "e mail"	Medium is set as "email"
Affiliates	Medium parameter is set as "affiliate"	Medium parameter is set as "affiliate"
Referral	Medium is set as "referral"	Medium is set as "referral"
Audio	Medium is set as "audio"	No default definition for this channel
SMS	Medium is set as "sms"	No default definition for this channel
Mobile Push Notifications	Medium contains "mobile" or "notification" in the parameter, or ends with "push", such as "mobile-push"	No default definition for this channel
Unassigned	Unassigned is the value Analytics uses when there are no other channel rules that match the event data.	When traffic's campaign parameters don't match channel definitions
Other	(other) is the value Analytics uses for an aggregated row due to cardinality limits	When traffic's campaign parameters don't match channel definitions

Ad platforms channels

Where possible, link GA4 with your ad platforms to use auto-tagging that comes with each integration. This ensures that your campaign parameters are automatically appended to your ad links, which help categorise your ad traffic in a correct GA4 ad platform channel. Auto-tagging also brings more ad dimensions for campaign reporting than manual tagging.

Refer to the table below for automatically tagged channels by ad platform.

Channel name	GA4 default channel	Google Ads channel	Display & Video 360 channel	Search Ads 360 channel
Paid Search	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Paid Video	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Display	Yes	Yes	Yes	-
Cross-network	Yes	Yes	-	-
Paid Social	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Audio	Yes	-	Yes	-
Paid Other	-	-	Yes	-

Please be aware that due to GA4 platform updates, some historic data might be impacted:

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You may see inconsistent data from Analytics integrations for default channel grouping if your reports or explorations include dates prior to June 15, 2022. For example, a channel that should be identified as Organic Shopping can be misidentified as Organic Search. Data from June 15, 2022 and later is not subject to this type of inconsistency. You can accurately identify the data from each integration by using the source platform dimension.

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