

Understanding 'Unassigned' Traffic in GA4

Common causes and how to fix them

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Unassigned' Traffic Has Three Main Causes

The good news is that each of these issues has a solution, and some you can implement yourself straight away.

1

Session Timeout Issues

Traffic showing as "(not set)" due to GA4's 30-minute session expiration. When users return after this window, the original source attribution is lost.

2

AI Referral Traffic

ChatGPT and Perplexity visits aren't being properly categorised because GA4 doesn't recognise these newer AI platforms as valid referral sources.

3

UTM Parameter Issues

Inconsistent or missing UTM parameters in campaign links lead to misattribution and unassigned traffic across your marketing channels.

Session Timeout: Why Traffic Shows as (not set)

GA4 sessions expire after 30 minutes of inactivity. When users return to an open browser tab after this timeout, GA4 can't identify the original source, resulting in misattribution.

Common Scenario

- 1** — 2:00 PM
User clicks your email link and begins browsing your site
- 2** — 2:05 PM
User leaves tab open and switches to other tasks
- 3** — 2:45 PM
User returns 45 minutes later - session has expired
- 4** — Result
GA4 records this as "(not set)" instead of "email"

📌 Your email campaigns, paid advertisements, and social posts are being under-reported because returning visitors appear as unattributed traffic.



Extend Session Timeout: Quick Fix You Can Implement Today

1

In GA4, navigate to Admin → Data Streams

2

Select your web data stream

3

Click "Configure tag settings"

4

Find "Adjust session timeout"

5

Change to 2-4 hours and click Save

Recommended Action

Extend your GA4 session timeout from 30 minutes to 2-4 hours. This simple configuration change doesn't require any technical implementation and can significantly reduce "(not set)" traffic.

Marc recommends starting with 4 hours to capture the majority of returning user sessions whilst maintaining data integrity.

Expected Impact

Significant reduction in "(not set)" traffic within 2-4 weeks of implementation

AI Referral Traffic: ChatGPT & Perplexity Showing as Unassigned

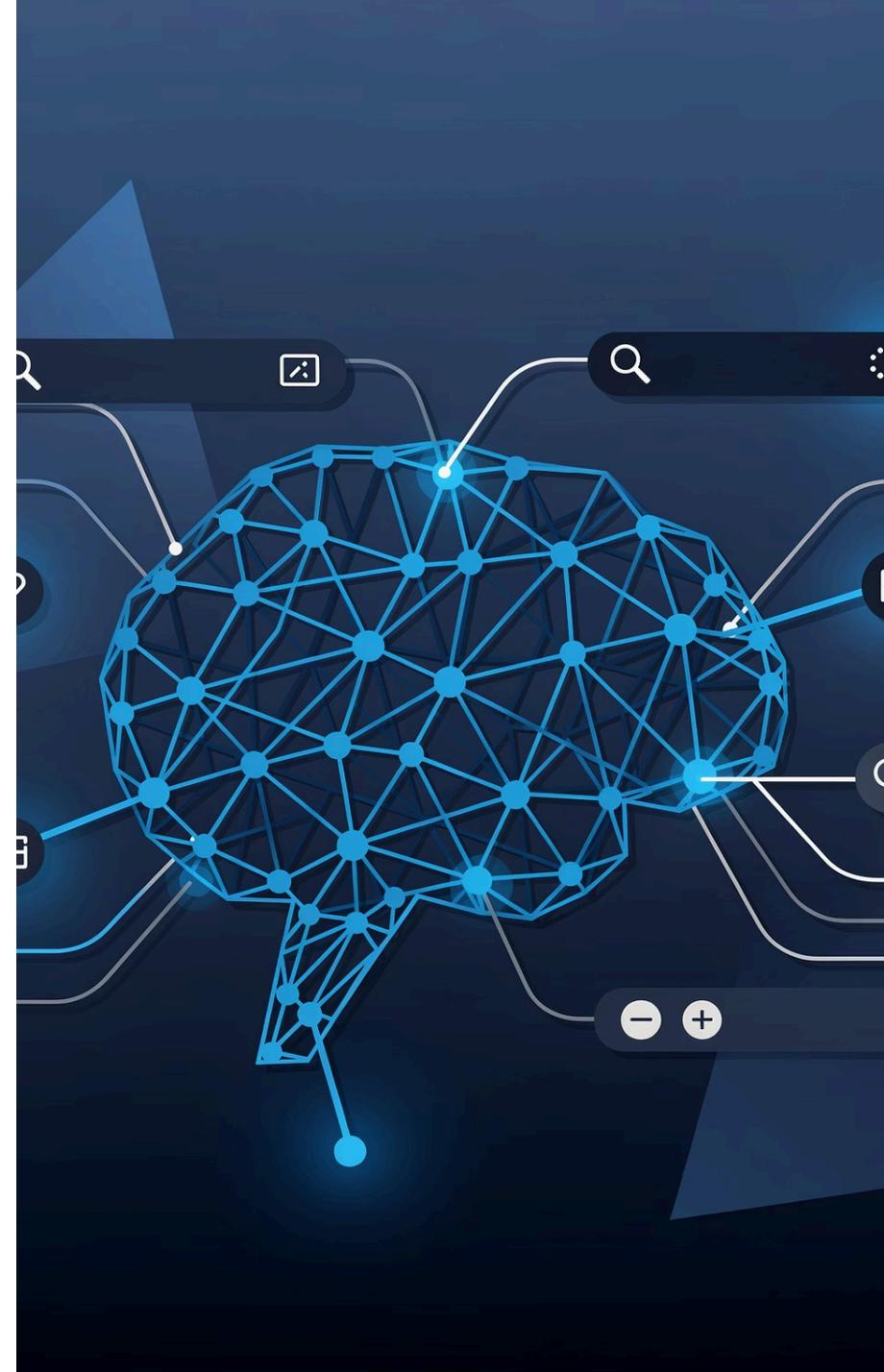
What's Happening

Traffic from ChatGPT and Perplexity is appearing in your "Unassigned" bucket because GA4 doesn't automatically recognise these as valid referral sources. As more users discover your site through AI search tools, this traffic source will continue to grow.

Why This Occurs

- These AI platforms are relatively new to the digital landscape
- GA4's default channel groupings don't include them yet
- They don't send standard referrer information that GA4 expects
- No built-in categorisation exists for AI-driven traffic

Without visibility into this channel, you're missing critical insights into how AI platforms are driving discovery and engagement with your content.



Create Custom Channel Groups: Categorising AI Traffic Properly

To properly track and analyse AI referral traffic, you need to create custom channel definitions in GA4 that recognise ChatGPT and Perplexity as distinct traffic sources.



If you have GA4 admin access, Marc can provide detailed setup instructions for creating custom channel definitions yourself. This gives you full control over the configuration.

Expected Impact

Clear visibility into how much traffic AI platforms are driving to your site, enabling better strategic decisions about content optimisation for AI discovery.

UTM Parameter Problems: Inconsistent Campaign Tagging

Using inconsistent or missing UTM parameters in campaign links? This is causing traffic to be misattributed or unassigned. Without consistent UTM taxonomy, you can't accurately compare campaign performance or understand which efforts drive results.

Common Issues Seen

- Missing utm_source or utm_medium parameters entirely
- Inconsistent naming conventions (Email vs email vs EMAIL)
- Overly generic values that don't provide insights (campaign, promo, test)
- Spaces or special characters breaking parameters
- Different teams using different tagging conventions

Why This Matters

UTM parameters are the foundation of campaign attribution. When they're inconsistent or missing, you lose the ability to track ROI, compare channel performance, and make data-driven decisions about where to invest your marketing budget.

Even small inconsistencies multiply across campaigns, creating significant data quality issues over time.

 See Marc's separate UTM Best Practices guide for detailed recommendations on building a consistent tagging taxonomy that scales across your organisation.

Summary: Three Things to Fix Your Unassigned Traffic



Extend Session Timeout

You Can Do This Now

Navigate to GA4 → Admin → Data Streams → Configure tag settings.
Change session timeout to 2-4 hours.

Expected Impact: 40-60% reduction in "(not set)" traffic within the first month.



Fix AI Referral Traffic

How Marc Can Help

Contact Marc to set up custom channel groupings. He will create proper categorisation for ChatGPT, Perplexity, and other AI sources.

Expected Impact: Complete visibility into emerging AI-driven traffic channels.



Implement UTM Taxonomy

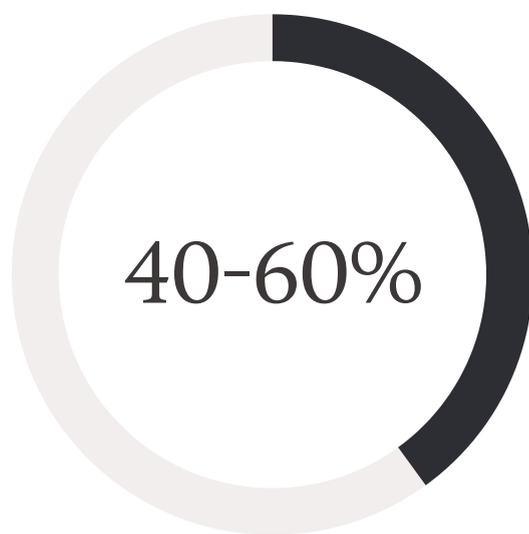
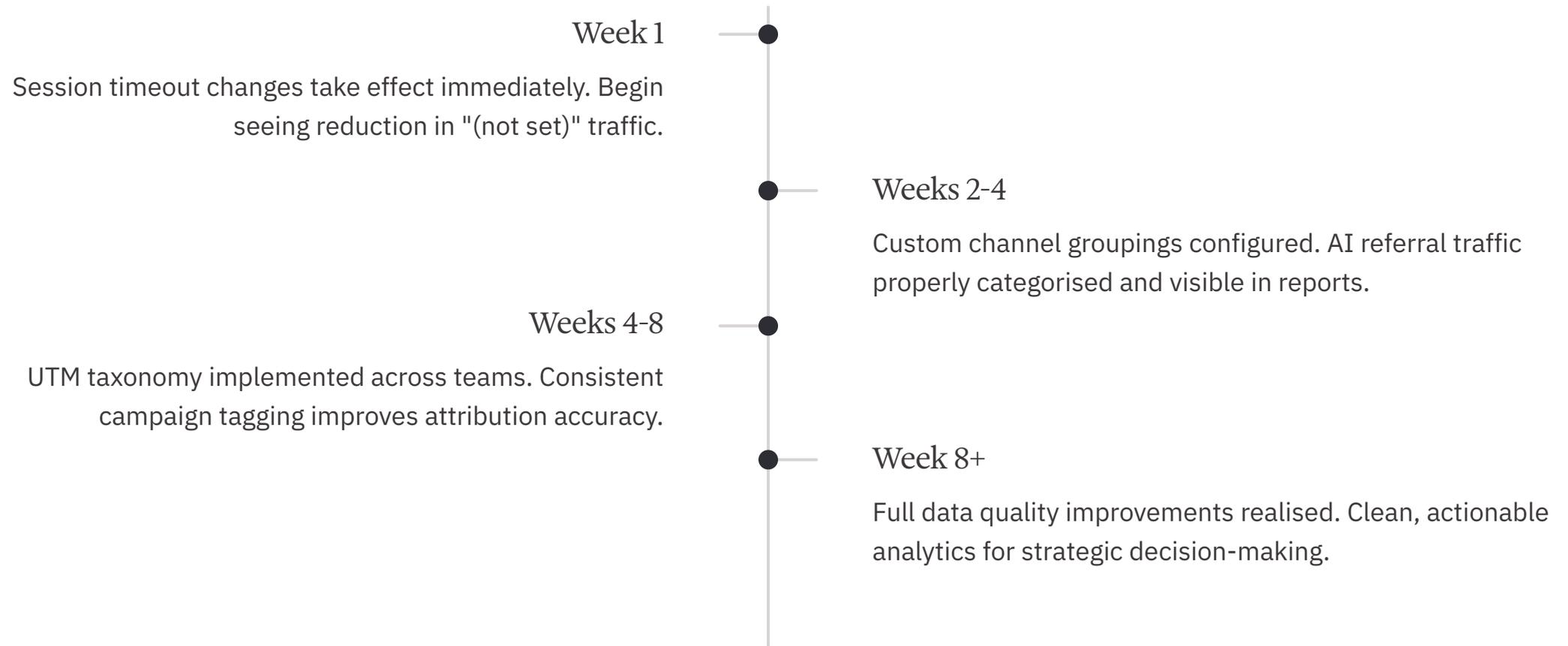
Refer to Separate Guide

Review the UTM Best Practices documentation. Create and document your naming conventions. Train your team on consistent usage.

Expected Impact: Accurate campaign attribution and reliable performance comparisons.

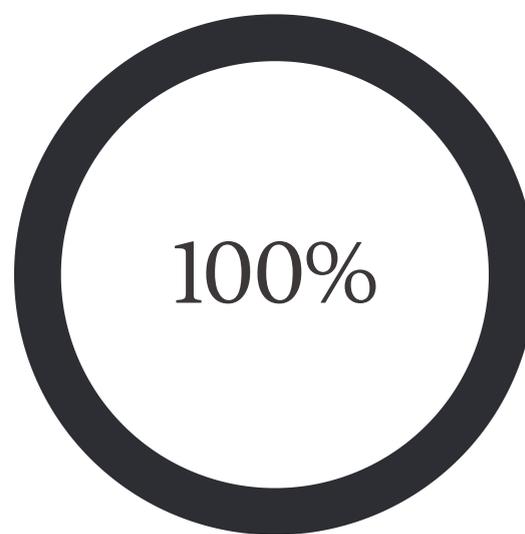
Expected Timeline & Results

Implementing these three fixes will progressively improve your data quality. Here's what to expect at each stage:



Reduction

Expected decrease in unassigned traffic



Visibility

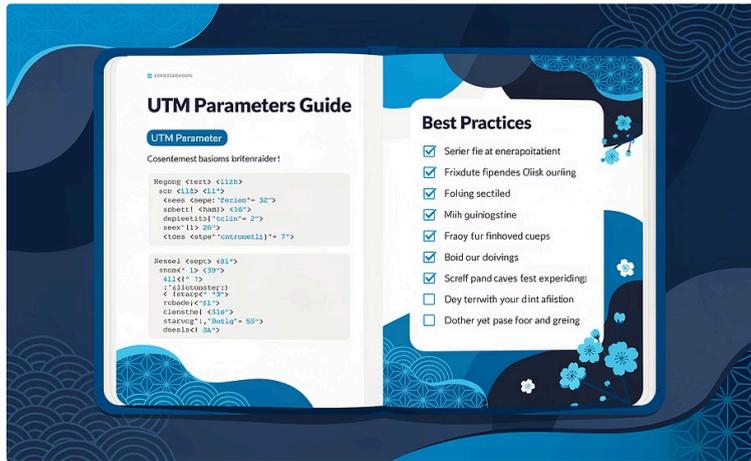
Complete AI referral traffic attribution



Weeks

Time to see measurable improvements

Need Help?



For UTM Questions

Refer to the separate UTM Best Practices guide for comprehensive documentation on creating consistent naming conventions and training your team.



For Technical Setup

If you need assistance with custom channel groupings for AI traffic, advanced session tracking solutions, or GA4 configuration questions, contact Marc, he will be happy to help.