UTM Taxonomy & Tracking Guide

Master UTM parameters for accurate attribution, multi-touch journey mapping, and data-driven budget allocation in a cookieless world.

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Metric Owl™

GETTING STARTED

How to Use This Guide

Reference First

Check before building any campaign URL

Follow Standards

Use approved values and naming conventions strictly

Use Templates

Apply provided examples to your campaigns

Get Support

Contact marketing ops with questions

What Are UTM Parameters?

Tags added to URLs that track traffic sources in analytics platforms like Google Analytics 4. They enable granular campaign performance tracking and persist through user sessions.

- Captured automatically by analytics platforms
- Critical for marketing attribution
- Enable custom segmentation and analysis

The 5 Core UTM Parameters

1	**utm_source** Traffic source (google, facebook, newsletter)
2	**utm_medium** Marketing medium (cpc, email, social, organic)
3	**utm_campaign** Specific campaign name (spring_sale_2026)
4	**utm_term** Paid search keywords (optional)
5	**utm_content** Ad variant or content differentiator (optional)

DEEP DIVE

utm_source: Traffic Origin

Purpose

Identifies the specific traffic source. Answers: "Where did this visitor come from?"

Most granular level of traffic attribution.

Naming Conventions

- Always lowercase
- Use hyphens for multi-word sources: customer-newsletter
- Be specific: use "linkedin" not "social"
- Platform names, not categories
- Consistent spelling across all campaigns

Approved utm_source Values

Paid Media

google, bing, facebook, instagram, linkedin, twitter, tiktok, pinterest, reddit, youtube

Email

customer_newsletter, prospect_newsletter, promotional_email, transactional_email

Referral/Partner

partner_[partnername], affiliate_[affiliatename]

Other

sms, push_notification, qr_code, direct_mail

utm_medium: Channel Type

Identifies the marketing medium or channel type. Answers: "What type of marketing activity?" Groups similar traffic sources using standard industry terms.

Critical: Never create custom medium names without approval. Stick to approved list for consistent reporting.

Approved utm_medium Values

Paid Channels

- **cpc** – cost per click (paid search)
- **cpm** – cost per thousand impressions
- **display** – banner/display advertising
- **paid_social** – paid social media
- **paid_video** – paid video advertising

Organic & Other

- **organic** – organic search
- **social** – organic social posts
- **email** – email campaigns
- **referral** – referral/partner traffic
- **affiliate, sms, push, qr**

utm_campaign: Naming Structure

Recommended format: [initiative]_[audience]_[date]_[geo]_[product]

Examples: spring_sale_2026_q2_us_shoes, brand_awareness_prospects_jan2026_global, webinar_customers_2026-03-15_emea

Campaign Naming Best Practices

Include Dates

Use formats like 2026q1, jan2026, or 2026-03-15

Be Descriptive

Concise but clear about campaign purpose

Use Underscores

Separate elements with underscores, lowercase only

Align Internally

Match naming in project management tools

OPTIONAL PARAMETERS

utm_term & utm_content

utm_term

Originally for paid search keywords. Identifies specific search terms triggering ads.

Always use for: Paid search campaigns, keywords

Optional for: Audience segments, product SKUs, A/B test variations

utm_content

Differentiates similar content or links in same campaign. Essential for A/B testing.

Use for: Creative variants (variant_a, variant_b), link placement (header_cta, footer_link), ad formats

Email Marketing UTMs

utm_source

Specific email list (e.g., customer_newsletter)

utm_medium

Always "email"

utm_campaign

Campaign name with date

utm_content

Link position or creative variant (optional)

Example: ?
utm_source=customer_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=spring_sale_2026_mar&utm_content=header_cta

Social Media UTM Guidelines

Organic Social

Source: platform (facebook, linkedin, twitter, instagram)

Medium: social

Campaign: campaign or initiative name

Example: ?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=thought_leadership_2026q1

Paid Social

Source: platform name

Medium: paid_social

Campaign: campaign name with date

Content: ad creative ID or ad set

Example: ?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=paid_social&utm_campaign=lead_gen_2026_q2&utm_content=carousel_v2

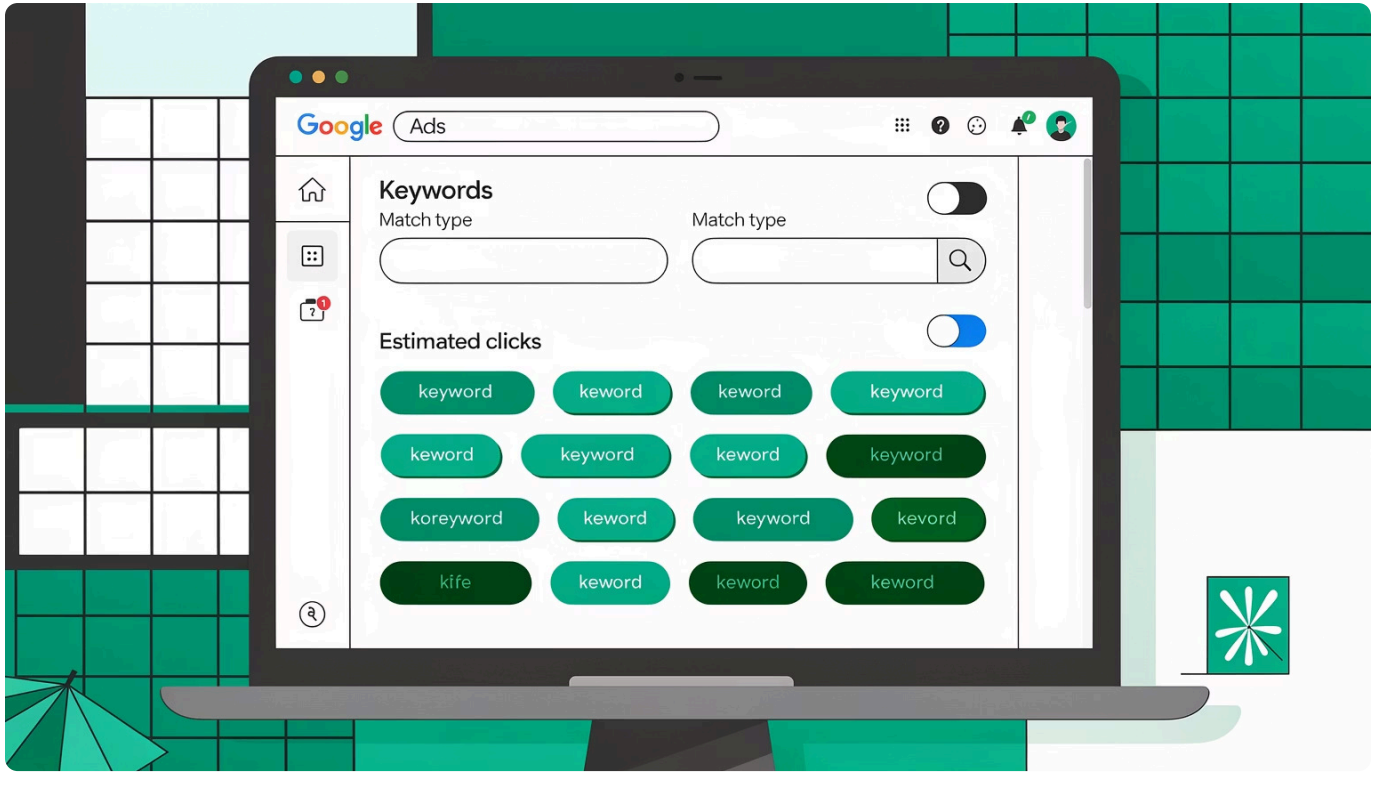
Paid Search Best Practices

Required Parameters

- **utm_source:** google or bing
- **utm_medium:** cpc
- **utm_campaign:** campaign name

Strongly Recommended

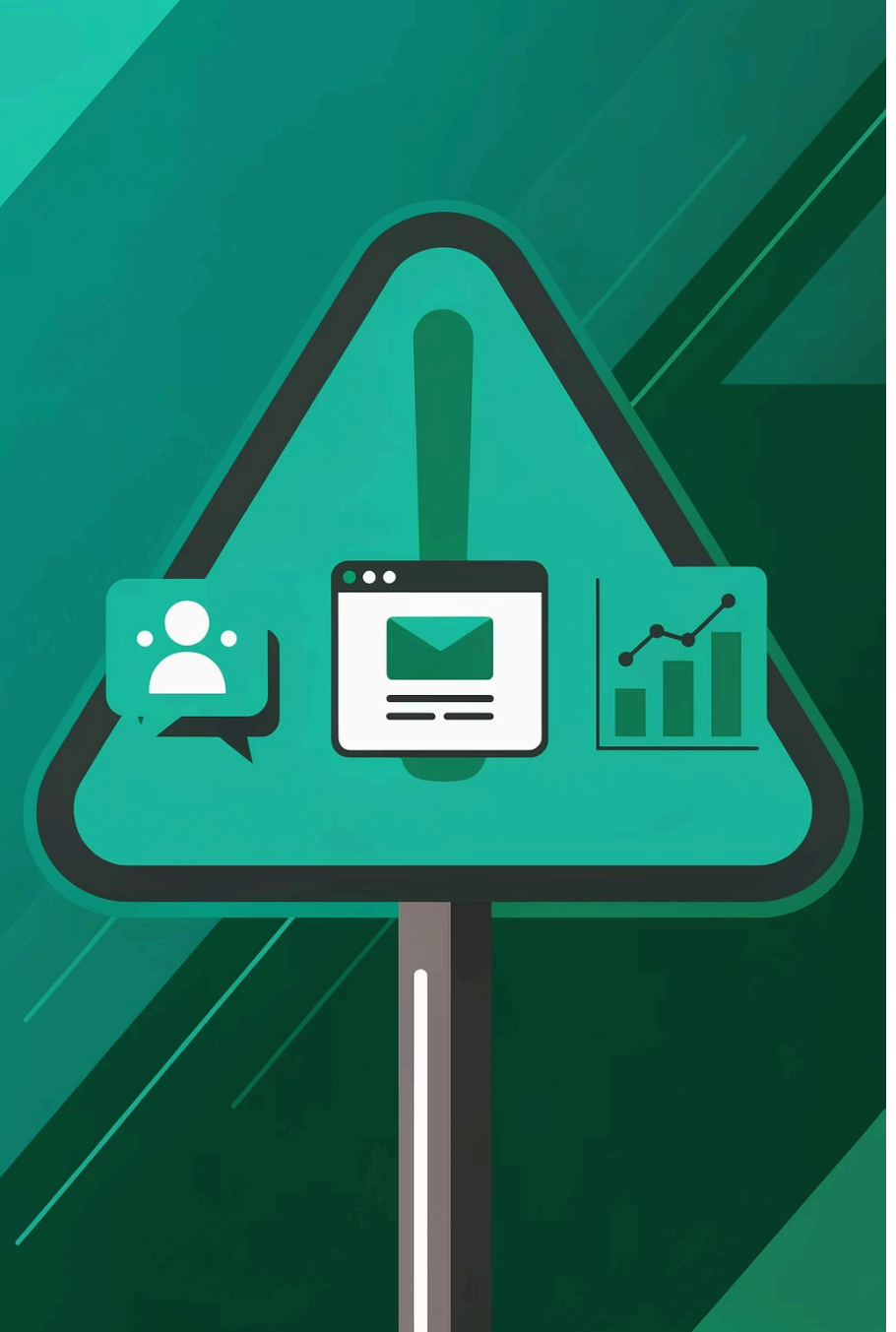
- **utm_term:** {keyword} (use dynamic insertion)
- **utm_content:** ad variant or ad group name



Example: ?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=brand_search_2026&utm_term={keyword}&utm_content=ad_v1

Pre-Launch QA Checklist

1. All required parameters included (source, medium, campaign)
2. All values are lowercase with no spaces
3. No special characters (!@#$%^&*)
4. Campaign name matches naming convention
5. Values match approved lists
6. Test URL loads correctly
7. Parameters are properly encoded
8. UTMs match campaign documentation



Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Using capitals or mixed case
- Spaces in parameter values
- Inconsistent source/medium naming
- Generic campaign names (campaign1, test)
- Missing required parameters
- Creating custom medium values
- Typos in parameter names
- Not URL encoding special characters
- Using utm_campaign for everything
- Forgetting to document custom naming

How UTMs Appear in GA4

Traffic Acquisition

Understanding where your traffic originates.

User Acquisition

Insight into how new users discover your property.

Conversions

Tracking goal completions and user actions.

Custom Explorations

Flexible analysis for deeper dives into data.

UTM parameters populate key GA4 reports including Traffic Acquisition, User Acquisition, and Conversion tracking.

Key dimensions: Session source/medium/campaign and First user source/medium/campaign enable multi-touch attribution analysis.

Real-World Example: Facebook Ad

Campaign: Spring Sale, paid social, creative variant B

Full URL: https://www.example.com/sale?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=paid_social&utm_campaign=spring_sale_2026_q2&utm_content=carousel_b&utm_term=warm_audience

Why This Works

- Platform-specific source (facebook)
- Clear paid social medium
- Descriptive campaign with timing (spring_sale_2026_q2)
- Content tracks creative variant (carousel_b)
- Term identifies audience segment (warm_audience)

Governance & Approval Workflow

Marketing team creates brief → Use approved UTM builder → Submit to Marketing Ops → Validation → Approval/corrections → Add to tracking sheet → Post-launch validation

Questions & Support

Email Support

marketing-ops@company.com

Slack Channel

#marketing-operations

Office Hours

Tuesdays 2-3pm

Remember: Consistent UTM usage = Accurate data = Better decisions