

# CHEATSHEET: UTM NAMING

The parameters, fixed naming rules and how GA4 sorts your values into channels

BY CÉDRIC FRAPPART, TEAM LEAD • UPDATED 27 SEPTEMBER 2026

## THE PARAMETERS

Always use source, medium and campaign. Missing parameters result in [not set], and the values are case-sensitive <sup>[1]</sup>.

| PARAMETER    | WHAT FOR                                             | EXAMPLE                 |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| utm_source   | Where the link was [always]                          | newsletter, facebook    |
| utm_medium   | The marketing medium [always]                        | email, social, referral |
| utm_campaign | The campaign or promotion [always]                   | spring-2027             |
| utm_id       | The campaign ID [strongly recommended]               | c2027-04                |
| utm_content  | Distinguishes creatives or links within one campaign | top-button, video-a     |

There are also utm\_source\_platform [strongly recommended], utm\_term for the paid keyword, and utm\_creative\_format and utm\_marketing\_tactic, which GA4 currently doesn't report <sup>[1]</sup>.

## HOW GA4 SORTS YOUR MEDIUM INTO A CHANNEL

The channel rules are fixed. If a session fits no rule, it ends up under Unassigned <sup>[2]</sup>.

| CHANNEL        | RULE FOR MANUALLY TAGGED TRAFFIC                                                                  | EXAMPLE (SOURCE / MEDIUM)                   |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Email          | Source or medium is email, e-mail, e_mail or "e mail"                                             | newsletter / email                          |
| Organic Social | Known social source, or medium social, sm, social-media or social-network (also with a space)     | facebook / social                           |
| Paid Social    | Known social source, with a medium that contains "cp", is ppc or retargeting, or starts with paid | instagram / paid_social                     |
| Referral       | Medium is referral, app or link                                                                   | partnername / referral                      |
| Display        | Medium is display, banner, expandable, interstitial or cpm                                        | newssite / display                          |
| Affiliates     | Medium is affiliate                                                                               | partnername / affiliate                     |
| Organic Search | Known search engine as source, or medium exactly organic                                          | google / organic, for your Business Profile |

SMS requires exactly sms as source or medium. Traffic from ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot or Grok comes under AI Assistant <sup>[2]</sup>. For QR codes or printed matter, create a custom channel group; a standard property can have two, which also work retroactively <sup>[3]</sup>.

## NAMING RULES

- Everything in lowercase, with one fixed `utm_source` per platform and one `utm_medium` per channel <sup>[1]</sup>.
- One owner of the list, who approves new values.
- Hyphens instead of spaces or special characters, which have to be encoded in a URL <sup>[4]</sup>.
- Campaign names as in the advertising platform (or `{{campaign.name}}`) <sup>[1]</sup>, with a period.
- The language in the campaign name (`spring-2027-nl`) for two campaigns, in `utm_content` (`nl-button`) for one.

## BUILDING LINKS

In a spreadsheet: URL in A, source in B, medium in C, campaign in D (Belgian regional settings: semicolons).

```
=A2&IF(ISNUMBER(FIND("?",A2)), "&", "?")&"utm_source="&B2&"&utm_medium="&C2&"&utm_campaign="&D2
```

If you later import costs from other platforms, also include `utm_id`, with exactly the same values as in your import file <sup>[5]</sup>.

## WHERE YOU DON'T PUT A UTM CODE

- **Google Ads with auto-tagging:** GA4 gives auto-tagging priority <sup>[6]</sup>.
- **Links within your own site:** measure your banners with `view_promotion` and `select_promotion` <sup>[7]</sup>.
- **Personal data or identifiers per recipient**, such as an email address or subscriber ID <sup>[8], [9]</sup>.

---

## SOURCES

1. URL builders: Collect campaign data with custom URLs (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/10917952?hl=en>
2. Default channel group (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/9756891?hl=en>
3. Custom channel groups (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/13051316?hl=en>
4. [GA4] How traffic source dimensions are updated (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/15593651?hl=en>
5. Import campaign data (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/10071305?hl=en>
6. About auto-tagging (Google Ads Help)  
<https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/3095550?hl=en>
7. [GA4] Set up ecommerce events (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/12200568?hl=en>
8. Best practices to avoid sending Personally Identifiable Information (PII) (Analytics Help)  
<https://support.google.com/analytics/answer/6366371?hl=en>
9. Guidelines 2/2023 on Technical Scope of Art. 5[3] of ePrivacy Directive, version 2.0 (European Data Protection Board)  
[https://www.edpb.europa.eu/system/files/2024-10/edpb\\_guidelines\\_202302\\_technical\\_scope\\_art\\_53\\_eprivacydirective\\_v2\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://www.edpb.europa.eu/system/files/2024-10/edpb_guidelines_202302_technical_scope_art_53_eprivacydirective_v2_en_0.pdf)

Rather have us take a look? Request the free tracking audit:  
[izoard.be/en/services/google-analytics-agency/free-audit/](https://izoard.be/en/services/google-analytics-agency/free-audit/)