



# TRACKING WEBSITE ENGAGEMENT USING CAMPAIGN LINKS

Using campaign links (or “tagged links”) is one of the most vital ways to understand how your email, social media, paid media, or any other kind of digital outreach is performing. A tagged link is a URL that contains additional information that is interpreted by analytics programs, such as Google or Adobe Analytics, to convey performance metrics. The additional information is known as parameters, and they appear at the end of a URL for digital outreach to let your analytics program know how a user got to the website.

## Benefits of Using Campaign Links

The use of campaign links is essential in tracking campaign performance. It allows your team to attribute traffic and conversions (completion of key website actions) to a campaign, platform, post, or creative. These links tell you where the traffic is coming from (such as Twitter or a newsletter), the platform driving the traffic (e.g., social media, email, search), and the campaign effort or goal associated with the activity (e.g., observance, paid media campaign). In short, by creating campaign links, you are guiding an analytics program to help tell you the story of how your website traffic is getting to you—the user’s journey.

### **The data collected in website analytics platforms from the use of tagged links can help you learn:**

- What your return on investment is from various marketing strategies.
- How often has a particular link or button been clicked. In other words, what is generating the greatest traffic to your site.
- What visitors do next after they click your link.
- Where visitors came from.
- Where visitors drop off.

## Whenever Possible, Use Campaign Links in Digital Outreach

Campaign links are primarily used in digital media efforts and should be placed within digital messages, posts, or materials that would lead the user to your website.

### **Examples include:**

- Banner ads
- Tweets
- Email marketing
- Facebook posts
- Instagram links
- Google search ads

They should not be used on your own website, only on digital platforms leading people to your website.

## Creating Campaign Links

Once the goals, objectives, and tactics are defined for a campaign, you can build out campaign links to track outreach performance on your website. How you structure a campaign link is dependent on the website analytics platform you are using. The two most common platforms, Google Analytics and Adobe Analytics, use different parameter structures. Google Analytics is recommended as a user-friendly platform. If you use Adobe Analytics, consult your developer/analytics lead to get the specifications around your specific tracking parameters.

## Instructions for Google Analytics Campaigns

### Campaign Parameters

When using Google Analytics for campaign tracking, there are five standard parameters, known as UTM codes, you can add to your URLs for tracking. The first three—Medium, Source, and Campaign—are required for successful data collection. The Content and Term parameters are not required but can provide more information about the placement of the link.

- **UTM\_Medium:** This is defined as the marketing channel (e.g., social, organic, paid, search, email).
- **UTM\_Source:** The specific site within the medium or channel that is sending traffic to your site (e.g., Google, Facebook, Twitter, partner site, and newsletter). For example, Google would be one of the sources within your Paid\_Search medium for paid search efforts that lead to your site.
- **UTM\_Campaign:** The individual campaign name. This field may be completed however it makes the most sense for you. The campaign parameter can be used across multiple tagged links to consolidate data into a higher-level view. For example, using the campaign “2023\_Outreach” across campaign links for paid search, banner ads, and email allows you to see consolidated data for all these tactics at a glance.
- **UTM\_Content:** This is an optional field. It’s used to differentiate similar content or links within the same source/medium. For example, if you have two call-to-action links within the same email message, you can use this field to differentiate between them.
- **UTM\_Term:** This field is rarely used or needed, but it can be used to differentiate between paid search keywords.

### Build Campaign Links

Use Google’s free link building tool to ensure nothing is missing from your campaign links: [Campaign URL Builder](#).

Example of a Campaign URL for Google Analytics with all parameters populated (tracking portion of the link is highlighted):

[https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html?utm\\_source=Google&utm\\_medium=Paid\\_Search&utm\\_campaign=2023\\_Outreach&utm\\_term=Fentanyl\\_Assistance&utm\\_content=Fentanyl](https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=Paid_Search&utm_campaign=2023_Outreach&utm_term=Fentanyl_Assistance&utm_content=Fentanyl)

### Data Results

You can view the resulting data from tagged links in a few different places within Google Analytics (for the purposes of this guide, we will only refer to GA4 accounts). This includes under **Acquisition** (with drop-downs for campaign and source/medium), by using the Explore feature to create custom reports to include all parameters, or through analysis via **Google Looker Studio** (which you can connect to your GA4 account for free and allows for more custom reporting).

## Overall Best Practices

- Test the campaign links in different web browsers (Chrome, Edge, Safari) to ensure they are not producing errors or redirecting to a page without parameters.
- When writing the tagged links, use underscores between words to differentiate between tactics and keep consistency in capitalizations.
- Always use SSL: <https://www.cdc.gov/XXXX>.
- Keep a spreadsheet of all generated URLs for reference and reporting.
- You can only add campaign parameters to links to website content, not any links to materials (e.g., PDFs, Word documents).

## Using Vanity URLs and Shortened Links

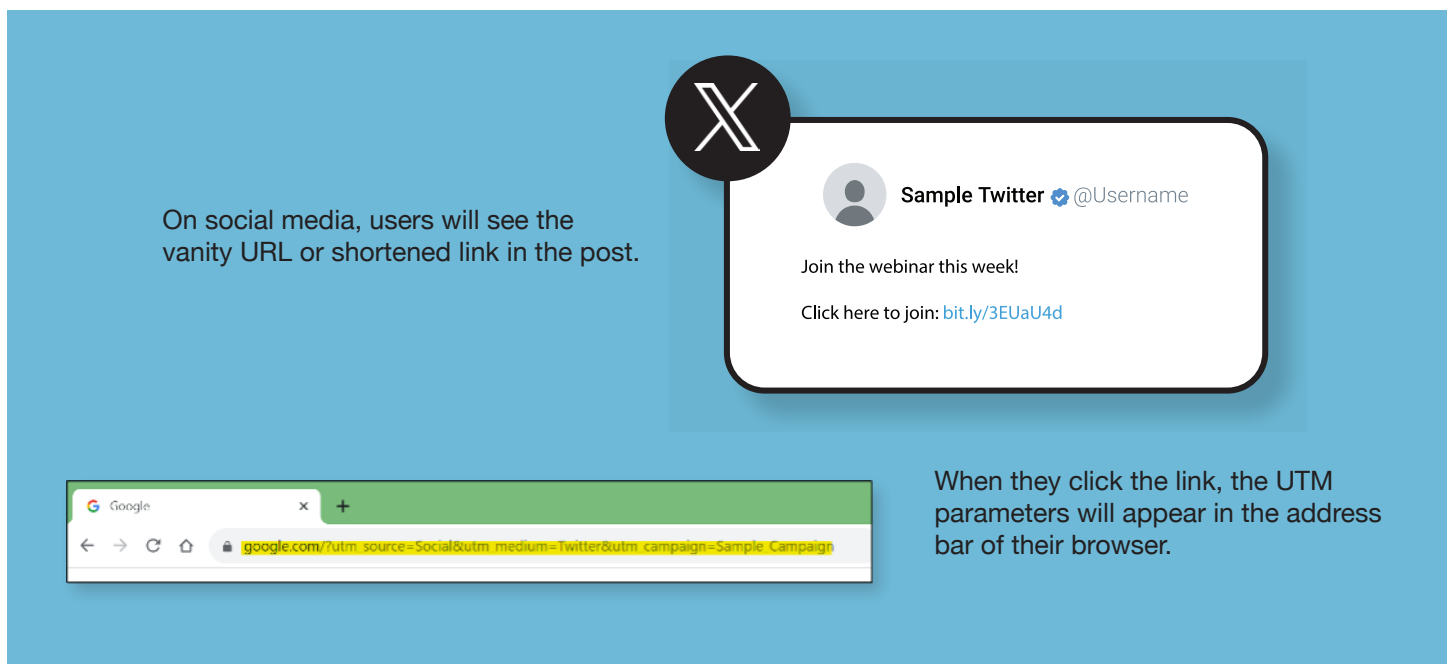
### Vanity URLs

It is best to use campaign links mostly on digital platforms. However, they can be used for offline outreach in a very specific way via vanity URLs. This method will require technical support from your developer or someone else on your technical team to implement.

A vanity URL is a brief and customized website link that is easy for visitors to type into a web browser. It is not a real page on your website, but instead redirects a user to another page with a longer URL.

For example, the CDC *Tips From Former Smokers*® campaign uses the URL <https://www.cdc.gov/tips> in much of their offline outreach, which redirects users to the longer URL of <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/index.html>. The vanity URL is easier for users to type into their browser, which is key for offline outreach.

To track the usage of a vanity URL, you can redirect the vanity URL to a page with campaign parameters in place. For example, if we use *Tips* again, you could theoretically have <https://www.cdc.gov/tips> redirect to [https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/index.html?utm\\_source=Billboard&utm\\_medium=Vanity&utm\\_campaign=2023\\_Outreach](https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/index.html?utm_source=Billboard&utm_medium=Vanity&utm_campaign=2023_Outreach). So, when users use the vanity URL, it is picked up in your campaign data via the campaign link at the end of the redirect.



On social media, users will see the vanity URL or shortened link in the post.

When they click the link, the UTM parameters will appear in the address bar of their browser.

### Link Shortener

Campaign links can be placed into a link shortener (such as [Bit.ly](https://bit.ly) or [Ow.ly](https://ow.ly)) to reduce a long URL to a shorter, more readable link while still preserving the destination URL. If the full link address will show in your digital outreach, use a link shortener to point to a campaign link. This is most useful within social media copy text. For example, the campaign link [https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html?utm\\_source=Google&utm\\_medium=Paid\\_Search&utm\\_campaign=2023\\_Outreach&utm\\_term=Fentanyl\\_Assistance&utm\\_content=Fentanyl](https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/index.html?utm_source=Google&utm_medium=Paid_Search&utm_campaign=2023_Outreach&utm_term=Fentanyl_Assistance&utm_content=Fentanyl) can be shortened to <https://bit.ly/3qGmGLN>.

If the link address can be hidden or hyperlinked (e.g., email, electronic document, sample content partners can use, digital ads), use just the base URL itself or explanatory text, and use the longer form with campaign parameters as the address for the hyperlinked text. For example: "Visit [Stop Overdose](#) to learn more about..."