FREE FIELD SHEET · Nº 079
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KEYWORD
REFERRAL

TRACK CHATGPT TRAFFIC WITHOUT UTMS

Set up a referrer-based channel in GA4 now that ChatGPT links may no longer carry UTM tags

CHECKS	DO FIRST	PARTS	COST
16	5	4	Free



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OpenAI appears to have stopped adding UTM parameters to links shown in ChatGPT results, starting around the release of GPT-6. Without those tags, GA4 may lump ChatGPT visits into "Direct" or "Unassigned" traffic instead of showing them as a distinct source, so this guide shows how to build a referrer-based channel to catch that traffic anyway.

ON THIS SHEET

1	What changed	4 CHECKS
2	Check if you are affected	3 CHECKS
3	Build a referrer-based channel in GA4	6 CHECKS
4	Keep an eye on this going forward	3 CHECKS

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PART 1 OF 4 — 4 CHECKS

What changed

☐ 1.1

OpenAI appears to have removed or replaced the UTM parameters it previously placed on links shown in ChatGPT results.

This makes it harder to know if a click came from ChatGPT versus some other platform, according to Search Engine Roundtable.

☐ 1.2

This change seems to have started with the release of GPT-6, about a week before the October 2024 report.

The timing is reported, not confirmed by OpenAI directly.

☐ 1.3

OpenAI had added UTM tracking to ChatGPT links back in June, then those tags were removed by October.

So the tagging behavior has changed at least twice in a few months, which means any tracking setup based on UTMs alone may need rechecking periodically.

☐ 1.4

It is not confirmed why OpenAI removed the parameters or whether this is permanent.

Search Engine Roundtable states they are not sure of the reason, so treat this as an open question, not a confirmed policy.

PART 2 OF 4 — 3 CHECKS

Check if you are affected

☐ 2.1 DO FIRST

Look at your GA4 Direct traffic for a recent, unexplained increase.

Traffic without UTM parameters and without a referrer GA4 recognizes often lands in Direct, so a spike there since GPT-6 launched is a sign ChatGPT clicks are being miscounted.

WHERE `GA4 › Reports › Acquisition › Traffic acquisition`

☐ 2.2

Check the Unassigned channel group for the same time period.

Traffic with a referrer GA4 cannot classify into an existing channel can show up as Unassigned instead of Direct, so check both buckets.

WHERE `GA4 › Reports › Acquisition › Traffic acquisition`

☐ 2.3

Filter your existing landing page or session source reports for chat.openai.com or chatgpt.com.

If you still see sessions with this referrer, GA4 is capturing the raw referrer domain even without UTM tags, which is what the new channel definition below will use.

WHERE `GA4 › Reports › Acquisition › Traffic acquisition › add filter on Session source`

PART 3 OF 4 — 6 CHECKS

Build a referrer-based channel in GA4

This uses GA4's custom channel grouping feature so ChatGPT sessions are labeled consistently even without UTM parameters.

☐ 3.1 DO FIRST

Create a custom channel group definition in GA4 admin.

Custom channel groups let you define a channel using conditions like source and medium, independent of UTM campaign tags.

WHERE `GA4 › Admin › Data display › Channel groups › Create new channel group`

☐ 3.2 DO FIRST

Add a condition matching the session source to the ChatGPT referrer domain.

This catches sessions where the referrer header shows chatgpt.com even when no UTM parameters are present.

WHERE `GA4 › Admin › Data display › Channel groups › Create new channel group › Add condition`

COPY THIS

```
Session source contains [chatgpt.com]
```

☐ 3.3

Name the channel something clear like AI Chat Referral or ChatGPT.

A clear name makes it easy to spot this channel in acquisition reports and compare it over time.

COPY THIS

```
Channel name: [ChatGPT Referral]
```

☐ 3.4 DO FIRST

Place this condition above your Direct channel rule in the ordering.

GA4 channel groups apply rules in order, so if Direct is evaluated first, sessions with a referrer but no UTM may get caught by Direct before reaching your new rule.

☐ 3.5

Save and apply the channel group, then check it under Reports once new data comes in.

Custom channel groups only apply going forward, they do not reclassify historical data, so give it a day or two before reviewing results.

WHERE `GA4 › Reports › Acquisition › Traffic acquisition › compare channel groups`

☐ 3.6

Build a comparable regex if you also want to catch other AI assistants later.

The same approach works for any referrer domain, so you can extend it if you start tracking traffic from other AI tools.

COPY THIS

```
Session source matches regex [chatgpt\.com|chat\.openai\.com]
```

PART 4 OF 4 — 3 CHECKS

Keep an eye on this going forward

☐ 4.1 • DO FIRST

Recheck whether ChatGPT links carry UTM parameters every few weeks.

OpenAI has added and removed UTM tagging before, in June and again in October, so the current no-UTM state may not be permanent.

☐ 4.2

Keep the referrer-based channel active even if UTMs return.

It acts as a backup so you are not solely dependent on UTM tags that OpenAI controls and can change without notice.

☐ 4.3

Document the source and date of this tracking setup internally.

If GA4 numbers for ChatGPT traffic change suddenly, having a note of when and why you built this channel helps you or a colleague troubleshoot faster.

WANT ME TO LOOK AT YOURS?

If you have gone through this and want a second pair of eyes, book a free call. We open the account together and look at what is actually happening. No deck, no pitch.

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SOURCES

1. https://www.seroundtable.com/utm-parameters-missing-chatgpt-42299.html