
TRAKR GUIDE

The GA4 Organic Label Problem

How to Find and Fix It

Why GA4 labels your paid Google Ads traffic "(organic)" and what to do about it.

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Source: support.google.com/analytics/answer/15612152

SECTION 1

The Problem

You paid for that click. GA4 calls it organic.

Someone clicks your Google Ad. The GCLID lands on the URL. You open GA4 and check Session source/medium: google/cpc. Correct.

Then you add "Session manual source/medium" to the same report. It says google/organic. Same click. Same session. Two different answers.

You think auto-tagging is broken. You spend two days debugging. Nothing is broken. This is documented behavior.

SECTION 2

The Mechanism

GA4 reads two separate inputs for every click.

Session dimensions (Session source/medium, Session campaign) come from auto-tagging. GA4 resolves the GCLID server-side and writes google/cpc with the campaign name from Google Ads.

Manual dimensions (Session manual source/medium, Session manual campaign name) come from UTM parameters in the URL. When there are no UTMs, GA4 falls back to the HTTP referrer. google.com as referrer = google/organic.

Landing page has	Source/Medium	Campaign	Source Platform
GCLID only (no UTMs)	google / cpc	(organic)	Manual
GCLID + Aggregates	google / cpc	Campaign name	Google Ads
GCLID + UTMs	google / cpc	utm_campaign	Manual

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SECTION 3

How to Check Your Account

Open GA4. Build a Free Form exploration with these dimensions side by side:

- Session source / medium
- Session campaign
- Session manual source / medium
- Session manual campaign name
- Source platform

Filter Session source/medium to **google / cpc**.

Look at the Session manual campaign name column. If you see **(organic)** next to your paid traffic, you have this pattern.

Check Source platform. If it says **"Manual"** on rows where you never used manual tagging, that confirms it. GA4 is falling back to the referrer because no UTMs were present on the URL.

We verified this on an enterprise Google Ads account. 11.7% of Paid Search sessions showed this exact pattern. Approximately 9,500 sessions per month labeled organic that were paid.

SECTION 4

Why This Matters

If you only use Session dimensions, this pattern is invisible. Session source/medium says google/cpc. Correct.

But there are real scenarios where you need manual dimensions:

Your agency names campaigns one way in Google Ads. You need them named differently in your reports. UTMs give you that control. Without UTMs, your manual dimensions fall back to referrer and show organic.

You build reports using manual dimensions because they work across all traffic sources with consistent naming. Those reports now show paid traffic as organic.

You compare Session dimensions with manual dimensions to audit your tagging. The mismatch looks like a bug. It is not a bug. It is two systems reading from different inputs.

SECTION 5

The Fix

Add UTM parameters alongside auto-tagging.

Auto-tagging still wins for source/medium. But utm_campaign fills in what the GCLID cannot resolve.

There is no "allow manual tagging to override auto-tagging" setting in GA4. That was Universal Analytics. It does not exist anymore.

When both GCLID and UTMs are present on the same URL:

- Auto-tagging wins for source, medium, and channel grouping (always)
- utm_campaign fills the manual campaign name field
- Source platform stays "Manual" (because UTMs are present)
- But now your manual campaign name says what you intended, not "(organic)"

The rule: if you run Google Ads with auto-tagging and you want control over your manual dimensions, always set UTMs on your ad URLs. Auto-tagging handles the rest. UTMs handle what auto-tagging cannot.

Source: support.google.com/analytics/answer/11242870

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

You just read what Google documented in a support table nobody finds. The mechanism is not complicated. The fix is not complicated. But knowing the fix and operationalizing it across 40 campaigns, three agencies, and two markets are different problems.

That is why I am building Trakr. One place to define your tracking syntax, generate URLs that follow it, and hand the tools to your agency so they cannot deviate. The UTM fix from Section 5 works. Trakr makes sure it keeps working.



Balazs Turan

16 years in digital analytics. Founder of Creative Data Engineers.
Building Trakr.

Launching Q3 2026. Join the waitlist at trakr.studio.