Where Did This Visitor Come From?

Google Analytics labels every visit with a **source**, a **medium**, and a **channel**. A **campaign** name is there only when the link was tagged. Here's what each one means and how to read them.

01 One Click, Three Tags

When someone clicks a link to your site, the link can include tags that say where it was posted. Google Analytics reads them when the page loads. Here's a tagged Facebook ad link, with the tags colored:

```
yoursite.com/decks/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=paid_social&utm_campaign=spring_deck_ads
```

01

Source the who

The site or app the visitor came from.

`google` · `facebook` · `bbb.org` · `newsletter`

02

Medium the how

The kind of link they clicked. **cpc** means a paid click; **organic** means a regular search result.

`cpc` · `organic` · `referral` · `email` · `paid_social`

03

Campaign the which

The name of the specific ad, email, or promotion. Only there when the link was tagged.

`spring_deck_ads` · `october_newsletter`

Channel is the category, and the report groups by it

Google Analytics reads source and medium together and files each visit under one channel from a short list. Source and medium are the detail; channel is the quick answer.

`facebook` + `paid_social` = **Paid Social**

Paid Search · Organic Search · Paid Social · Organic Social · Email · Referral · Direct · Display · AI Assistant

02 How to Read a Value

SOURCE / MEDIUM	CHANNEL	WHAT HAPPENED	CAMPAIGN
`google` / `cpc`	Paid Search	Someone clicked your Google ad	filled in by Google Ads
`google` / `organic`	Organic Search	Someone clicked your regular Google listing	none; Google doesn't tag these
`facebook` / `paid_social`	Paid Social	Someone clicked your tagged Facebook ad	`spring_deck_ads`
`newsletter` / `email`	Email	Someone clicked a link in your email	`october_newsletter`
`bbb.org` / `referral`	Referral	Someone clicked a link to you on another site	none; the link wasn't tagged
`yelp.com` / `referral`	Organic Social	Google counts Yelp, Houzz and Tripadvisor as social sites	none; the link wasn't tagged
`(direct)` / `(none)`	Direct	Typed your address, used a bookmark, or came from somewhere that hides the source	none

Why Direct Is Bigger Than It Looks

"Direct" is the catch-all for visits with no readable source, not a count of people who typed your address. These land there too:

- Links without tags in texts, PDFs and documents
- QR codes and printed addresses
- Links that lost their tags in a redirect or URL shortener
- Some visits where an ad blocker interfered

Tag the Links You Control

Google Ads tags its own clicks (auto-tagging). Links you share elsewhere carry no tags unless you add them, so they show up as Direct or Referral with no campaign name.

- Add tags to emails, social bios, QR codes, and partner links
- Pick one spelling and keep it: **facebook**, not **FB** or **Facebook**
- Free tool: Google's Campaign URL Builder