



# Email Marketing Best Practices for Hotels

**Engage Your Guests with  
Professional Email Campaigns**

**Travel  
Media  
GROUP**



# Getting Started

Email can be a powerful tool for businesses. Customers want to receive promotional emails from businesses they buy from, and business owners love to see the results. From a marketing perspective, emails provide some of the best ROI on your marketing investment — **up to 44% ROI**.

Like any advertising avenue for your hotel, the best strategy involves some testing, measuring, and refining. In this section, we're sharing what you need to know to get started using email marketing for your hotel.



## 1. Choose Your Email Program

You don't have to make a huge investment to start making great emails. Providers like MailChimp or Campaign Monitor provide simple drag-and-drop builders with premade templates. You don't need a graphic designer to make beautiful emails. When choosing an email provider, you need to gather the following information:

### 1. How many email addresses will I send to?

*Each email address is often known as a "contact"; all the email addresses you have on file are your "database."*

### 2. How often will I be emailing my database?

*Some email providers charge by the number of contacts you have, while others charge by the number of times you email in a month (your "sends").*

### 3. What features do I need to access?

*Different plan levels will allow you to access higher levels of analytics beyond the number of opens or clicks on an email. More advanced actions could be optimizing send times, advanced list segmentation, and automation actions.*



## 2. Set Up Your Lists

As a best practice, you need to split up your email database into a number of lists to give email subscribers the content that's most relevant to them. If you send too many emails to your contacts that aren't interested, they may unsubscribe – leaving you unable to ever win them back through email.

Create different subscription types to categorize your lists and send the content they want to see. Here are some example lists you might set up for your hotel email marketing and the kind of content you can send them:

- Past guests: promotional emails inviting them back; special loyalty offers; early access deals. Can trigger actions like an email 3 months after a stay.
- Prospective guests: reminders to book before busy holidays; special offers to incentivize bookings; features about your property.
- Newsletter list: provide info on property updates, local events, and insider information; give a promo for email newsletter subscribers whether they are previous guests or not.
- Special event lists: reminders and offers to past guests and prospective guests about recurring events, such as Christmas tree lighting ceremonies or sporting events.

## 3. Build Your Emails

Your email provider should have a number of templates ready for you to customize for your hotel. Choose a template you like and start designing. Replace the photos with ones of your hotel, change the colors to match your brand guidelines, and update the contact information to match your hotel.

There are a few guidelines that you must follow before sending an email – and your email service provider will likely prevent you from sending unless you're compliant. You must include:

- Your business's address in the footer of the email
- A way for people to "opt-out" or unsubscribe from your emails
- Accurate "from" information for your email

In addition, you need to have received permission from your customers to use their email address to contact them. This is likely included in your terms and conditions on your website forms and booking pages but check with your legal team first.

Once your template is built, create a new email. It doesn't need to be complicated, but make sure that your subject line correlates to the information you're including inside. Send test emails to yourself first to check that everything appears correctly in your inbox and on a mobile inbox. Double-check that all the links work and go to where they're supposed to go. Finally, it's time to send your email.

## 4. Send Your Email

Your email provider should take you through all the steps you need to send your first email. After you send your email, you can check back later to see how many people have opened your email, who clicked on the links, and other useful metrics so you can make your next send even better.

With the right strategy behind your hotel email marketing, you can drive reservations, maintain brand awareness, and build guest loyalty. Once you've set up your first email, it'll get easier and easier to keep sending great content to your database.



# Email Deliverability

In the first section, we shared the steps you need to take to get started with email marketing for your hotel. Now, we want to help you make your emails even better. We're going to help you get your emails into inboxes, earn opens and lead to clicks and conversions. In this section, we're going to explain how to manage email deliverability to make sure your lists are seeing your emails.



## What is Email Deliverability?

The first step to getting emails to pay off for you is to make sure they're getting into inboxes. As email providers try to improve efficiency for their customers, email marketers have to contend with advanced spam filters and automatic promo filtering. That's where email deliverability comes in.

Email deliverability refers to the **likelihood that your email will make it to an inbox**. Deliverability is measured in your email program as a **delivery rate**. A delivery rate of 98% means that 98% of the people on your list had the email arrive in their inbox. The other 2% were not delivered, such as because the email bounced or the receiver's email client marked your email as spam.

Email deliverability depends on a number of variables that change based on the IP that you email from, the email provider the receiver uses, the contents of your email, and how the receiver interacts with emails.





## Trust and Email Marketing

Email deliverability isn't always mandated by hard and fast rules. While almost every email tip sheet will tell you to never use all-caps or common spam words like "free" in the subject line, there are trusted senders who still make it into inboxes while breaking all the rules:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ☆ <b>Ulta Beauty</b>         | <b>FREE SHIPPING</b> on select items 🤖 - Ulta Beauty <a href="http://click.email.ulta.com/?qs=">http://click.email.ulta.com/?qs=</a>                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ☆ <b>BJ's Wholesale Club</b> | <b>Fresh deals. Free shipping. Oh my</b> - Please use this link to view in browser. <a href="https://emails.bjs.com/H...">https://emails.bjs.com/H...</a> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ☆ <b>World Market</b>        | <b>Never fear: Your FREE Halloween Gift is here</b> - Plus, our Chocolate Avocado Muffin recipe is so good...   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ☆ <b>JOANN Stores</b>        | <b>Final Day! FREE SHIPPING + 60% off 1 Regular-Priced Fabric</b> - NEW Faux Shearling fabric is cozy to ...  |

How do Ulta and other brands make it into inbox while using **spam trigger words**? They've built **trust** with the email filters through authority and user engagement. Here are a few simple ways to improve deliverability and avoid the Spam folder:



### 1. Send from a verified domain

When you send an email blast, you'll set a "from" email. Set up a dedicated email address at your hotel's domain (such as [news@hotelname.com](mailto:news@hotelname.com) instead of [hotelname@yahoo.com](mailto:hotelname@yahoo.com)). This shows web filters that you're a legitimate business representing who you say you are.

**Why this matters for hotels:** Because your potential guest will be providing their credit card information to your website to book, they want to be confident that the email they received is from you and that the website you're linking to is trustworthy.

### 2. Use a double opt-in method

In short, double opt-in means that you're confirming that the person wants to receive an email. While you may get fewer overall subscribers, the ones you get will want to get your emails. Usually, this means that a person has to opt-in using more than one method – a checkbox or form fill followed by an email confirmation.

**Why this matters for hotels:** If you automatically add guests to a list when they make a reservation, then the next day you could send a second email asking them to click a button confirming that they actually wanted to be on this email list.



### 3. Don't email unengaged contacts

Just like with double opt-ins, opting out people who aren't interacting with your emails is a great way to increase deliverability. By removing people who aren't opening or reading your emails, your click-through rate will be higher - making email filtering programs see you as sending relevant emails. Consider opting out subscribers who haven't opened an email in 6 or 12 months, or send an "opt-in" email again to make sure they want to hear from you.

**Why this matters for hotels:** Your list will have a higher "churn rate" than retail businesses who will get more return business. You may have subscribers who stayed at your hotel and don't plan on returning to your city or subscribers who used their work email address to book and no longer work for that company. You'll make your lists stronger by keeping them clean.



### 4. Make it easy to unsubscribe

If one of your contacts doesn't want to receive your emails, it's in your best interest to help them unsubscribe. If a person can't easily find your unsubscribe button, they'll use their email's spam complaint function, tarnishing your reputation. Don't force people to keep getting emails they don't need.

**Why this matters for hotels:** When planning a trip, potential guests could be signing up with multiple hotels while trying to find the best deal and don't actually want to be on your list past finding a discount. Let them go!

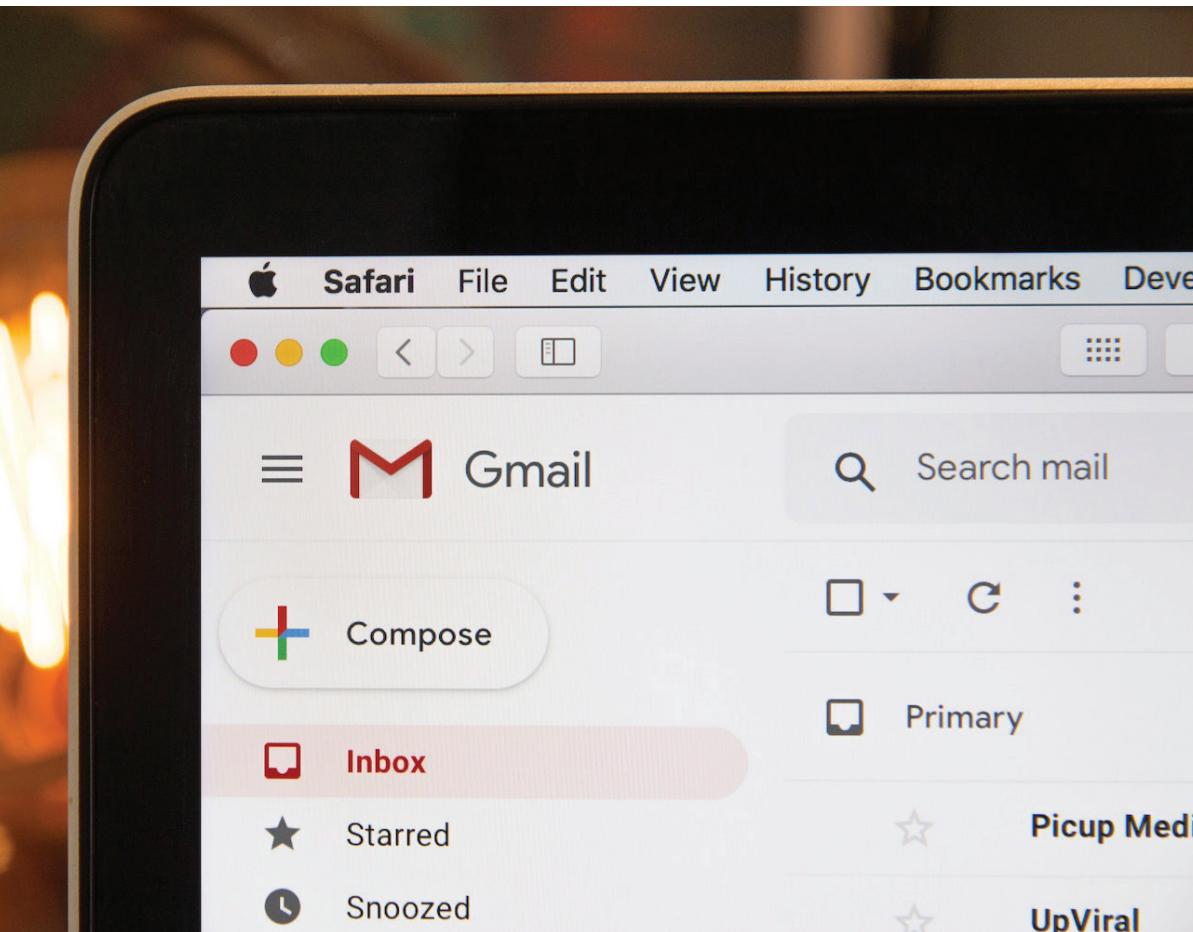
As you can see, a lot of the best practices for email deliverability mean you'll actually be sending out fewer emails - after all, you're making it a little more difficult for people to get your emails while helping your list unsubscribe! But, it's vital to your email strategy that email providers and filtering systems trust your domain and you as an emailer. Otherwise, subscribers may not even see your email - let alone open and act.





# Building Your Email

Previously, we shared tips for building your [hotel email marketing program](#) and explained [what email deliverability is](#). In this section, we'll tell you everything you need to include in the actual design of your email.



## Organize Your Message

A typical hotel email newsletter may contain upcoming events, property updates, blog posts, and special offers. Consider which item is the most important for your readers to see or what you want them to click on the most. Generally, the most-clicked on links will be “above the fold.” That means that they’ll be visible on the screen before scrolling. Remember that when it comes to reading emails on a mobile device, you have even less space to catch their eye.

For each item you’re covering in the email, give enough of a teaser to help readers want to click through to read more – not just a headline but also not a novel. Ideally, each notable section would contain an image, some text, and a call to action (CTA) like “click here to read more;” “claim your offer;” or “book now.”

Remember the importance of catering your message to your lists. Don’t bombard guests who just checked out with messages to stay again, or you’ll risk losing them. Do keep engaged readers in the loop with updates about your hotel.



## Optimize with Images

When beginning to build emails, start to keep an eye on the marketing communications you receive. One thing they probably all have in common? Impactful images. Whether it's a banner at the top of your email with a photo of your hotel or a large attention-getting graphic, most emails you receive are probably very image-heavy.

The reason? Pictures work. According to [Vero](#), marketing email campaigns with images get a 42% higher clickthrough rate than those that don't. But for non-marketers, graphic design is a daunting task. Luckily, there are plenty of tools that can help.

Most email programs with drag-and-drop editors will have attractive templates you can edit with your own photos without needing to know a lot about design. For even more customization, try a free graphic creator like [Canva](#) to make your emails really stand out.

Keep these rules in mind when adding images to emails:

1. **Clarity:** Download images at dimensions least the size of the email; for most, this means downloading images that are 600-900 px wide. This will ensure that the images and any words you add to them will be clear.
2. **Speed:** Follow the guidelines above and don't embed images larger than 2 times the email width. This will result in slower loading times and people may click away rather than wait.
3. **Text:** All email programs should have the ability to add alternative text, or "alt text" descriptions to images. This allows people with screen readers and those who only accept text emails to know what is in the image.



## Scheduling & Sending

With the messages and text set, you're ready to move onto sending your email! Before the next step, remember our tips from previous blogs:

1. Choose the correct lists for your email
2. Write a catchy but non-spammy subject line
3. Set up your footer & unsubscribe links

Now, for the final big question: when do you send it? If you Google *The best time to send an email*, you'll a plethora of answers that, at the end of the day, don't really help you. Because it doesn't matter when all of a certain email provider found that random people were most likely to read an email. What matters is when your lists are most likely to read them.

So the best course of action is simply to send. Test sending on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons and Saturday nights. Try Friday at 4:30 when people are bored with being at work and thinking about getting away. Test out different times of the day and different days of the week, then look through the analytics. Find out if there are certain days or times that seem to work better, then keep testing around that information. By paying attention, you'll only make your next email better.





# Basic Success Metrics

Now that you've built an email and improved your email delivery, now what? For far too many businesses, they just rinse and repeat. By making your emails better each send, you'll be able to keep subscribers engaged and get more conversions.

Before you just copy your last email template, take advantage of your email metrics to get the most out of your email marketing program. In this section, we'll cover:

- Open rate
- Click-through rate
- Click to open rate

## Where to Find Your Analytics

Any email marketing program will provide analytics for each individual email you send as well as overall rates for your company. In some cases, it's easier to access than others. Often, you'll view your email history, then click on the email you want and select an option like "Reports" or "Details."

At the most basic level, you'll be able to find out how many people interacted with your email and what they were interested in.



## Basic Metrics

For all of the main metrics, you'll find both the rates and *Unique* rates. Just as in website traffic terms, a *unique* click means it was the action of a single user. If one person clicks one link, that's one unique click. If one person clicks 1 link twice, that would be one unique click but two *total* clicks.

**Open Rate:** the percentage of email recipients that opened your email. Open rate is calculated as a percent as  $[\text{number of people who opened}] / [\text{number of people it was sent to}] \times 100$ .

The biggest contributor to the open rate is the **Subject Line**. It could be that the recipient just didn't see your email in their inbox (it could have been overlooked or automatically sorted into a Promotions folder. Or, they saw it but the subject line wasn't interesting or relevant enough for them to open.

**Click-Through Rate:** the percentage of people who clicked your email out of the total people who had the email delivered to them. Click-through rate is calculated by  $[\text{number of email clicks}] / [\text{number of email recipients}] \times 100$ .

Click through rate tells you how good the **content** of your email is. You can test changes to the email, such as changing the order of information, adding more photos, or changing heading size and colors. With each change, monitor the click-through rate to see if clicks improved.

**Click to Open Rate:** the percentage of people who clicked out of those who opened it. Click to open rate is calculated as  $[\text{unique clicks}] / [\text{unique opens}] \times 100$ .

Because in click-through rate is determined by dividing the clicks by the total number of sends, you can't tell if the rate is due to the open rate or the content of the email. That's why click to open rate is a much better way to see how successful your email is.



## Keys to Success

As in all areas of marketing, you can continue to test, iterate, and improve on what you've done before. If you want to see if you can improve your open rates, use A/B testing to try out two different subject lines for each email to see which performs better.

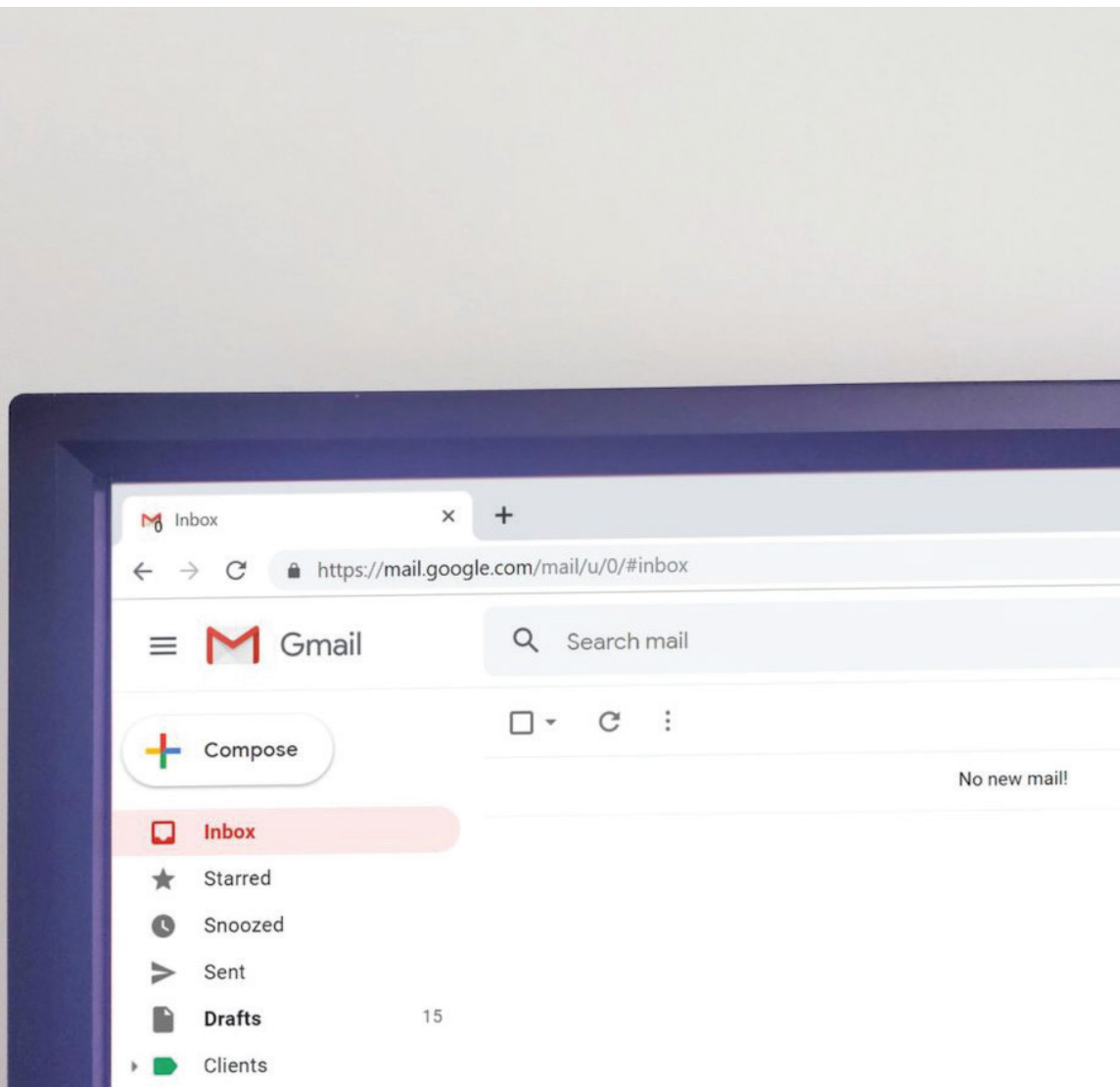
While it can be tempting to make a lot of changes at once, it's vital to be patient and only test one or two distinct items at a time. First, you want to be somewhat consistent between emails to not confuse or frustrate your subscribers. Secondly, you'll get more helpful data. If you both change the order of information in your email and change the colors of your headings and buttons, you won't know which of those to attribute your success or failure to.

Opens and clicks are the cornerstones of email metrics. In our next section, you can learn how to find the success of emails in terms of actual hotel revenue.





# Advanced Tracking: UTM Codes



## Learning How to Attribute Sales to Marketing Campaigns

Have you ever tried to send a link to a friend, only to see it is a hideous, lines-long URL? That's because there are attributes on the end of the link to help the website track where their website traffic came from. UTM codes work in the same way; they are a code appended to the end of your links so that you can track how much of your website traffic is driven by emails.

The basic structure of a utm link is:  
`www.link.com?utm_parameter=type`

There are a number of different parameters you can use to identify which source within a campaign traffic came from. So, if you're running a special and share it on email, social media, Google ads, and on a partner website, you'll know where the traffic came from.

**Tip:** Before using UTM codes, you need to **set up your Google Analytics account**. Then, to track conversions, **set up Goals** in your account. For hotels, these could be reservations, returning customer bookings, email sign-ups, and loyalty program sign-ups.



## Understanding UTM Code Parameters

These are the parameters available in a UTM code. You do not have to use every parameter; just use the ones that you need to define the source.

- **Source:** where the link is being used and where the traffic is coming from
  - *Example:* email newsletter, Google ad, social media
- **Medium:** the type of content the person interacted with to get there
  - *Example:* website banner, website pop up, email banner, email button
- **Campaign:** the **campaign** this link is related to supporting
  - *Example:* loyalty (for returning guests), august (for a back to school special)
- **Term:** the keyword used in an ad campaign
  - *Example:* 4th night free, free parking
- **Content:** to differentiate between link placement, such as if you have two links in one email
  - *Example:* 1 or 2 to define the order of links on a page

Out of all of these parameters, the most important are source, medium, and campaign. Term is less often used now that ad platforms are much more effective at tracking keyword success. And Content is often too granular a method of data collection. If you don't have time to actually use the data to generate actionable findings, leave it off.

Using these parameters, the link you may use for an email newsletter being sent only to previous guests encouraging them to stay could look like:

`www.hotelwebsite.com?utm_source=newsletter  
&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=loyalty`

If you don't have access to an **analytics platform** that allows you to see actual conversions of your social media posts and ads, UTM tracking is a great way to find out what's working and what's not.

However, remember that there is no magic bullet in marketing. The number of *touchpoints* a person experiences before making a purchase is **between 20 and 500!** A touchpoint could be seeing a television commercial, doing a search of "What's the weather in Boulder in March?" and browsing a hashtag on Instagram.

That's why we always recommend that hoteliers have a holistic approach to marketing their property. All the systems work together (website, social media, and review management) to give you the best results.

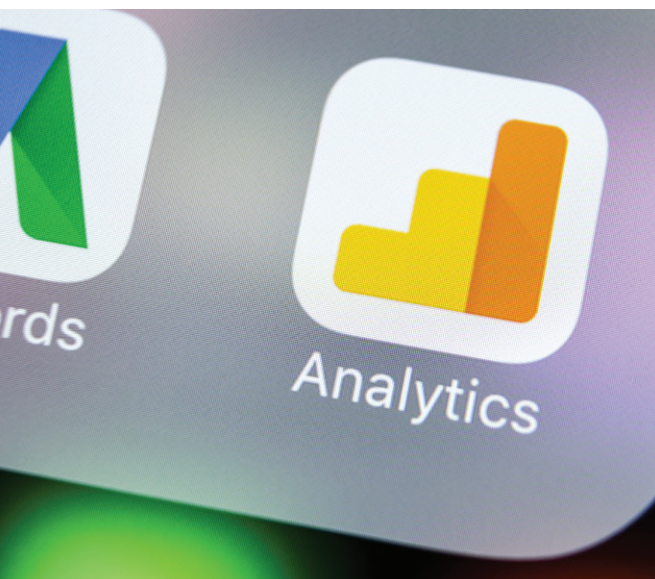




## How to Track Results from UTM Codes

So you've started using UTM codes. Now what? Google Analytics provides helpful reporting so you can see exactly which links were successful, informing your future marketing strategy.

For instance, let's say that you were able to find that a lot of people clicked on your email banner and converted to sales, but very few clicked on your website pop-up and none converted. You may want to remove the website pop-up (which may be hurting the experience of website visitors) and instead try to do an additional email send or test more graphics in your emails.



## How to Track Traffic from UTM Codes:

Within Google Analytics, it's easy to see how much traffic you're driving from different sources and campaigns. This should help inform you on how much time and money you want to spend in areas like building emails, creating social media content, and building promos.

To track traffic from UTM Codes:

1. Sign into <http://analytics.google.com/>
2. In the Home screen, scroll down to a section titled *What pages do your users visit?*
3. In this section, click *Pages Report*
4. Under the graph, there is the section **Primary Dimension:** Page | Page Title | Other
5. Click *Other*, then under Acquisition, click *Campaign*  
The list will now show website traffic based on this Campaign
6. In the **Secondary Dimension** dropdown, click the other segment you would like, such as *Source*, *Medium*, or *Source/Medium*
7. At the top right of the page, you can adjust the dates of the report, export this report, save to review again later, or export the data

**Pro tip:** If you do not define *source* or *medium* parameters in your UTM code or you receive traffic not from a source you're tracking, Google will attempt to identify what it can, but it will be less precise than when you build the UTM yourself. Here are some common referrals you might see:

- Source (direct) / medium (none): the website visitor typed your website address into the address bar and directly accessed your website.
- Source - m.facebook.com: the user was on Facebook in their mobile phone browser or on the Facebook app on their phone
- Source Current Customers / medium Email: when you enable tracking on email programs like MailChimp, the source may fill with the name of the audience you sent to



## How to Track Sales from UTM Codes:

To take an even deeper dive into understanding your marketing ROI, you can attribute actual sales to marketing campaigns. As we mentioned earlier, you will need to have Google Analytics Goals set up in order to track this. Goals are tracked when a user takes a specified action on your website, such as completing a form or a purchase.



In practice, here's what it might look like:

You create a Facebook ad promoting your Spring Break "stay 4 nights get the 5th free" promotion. A Facebook user clicks on the ad, reviews your website, and reserves a room. Without tracking, you don't know how much your ad spend paid off or how many people would have booked directly on your website without seeing that ad.

To track sales from UTM Codes:

1. Sign into <http://analytics.google.com/>
2. On the left menu, select *Acquisition > All Traffic > Source/Medium*
3. In the *Conversions* section, select your goal.

Primary Dimension: Source / Medium    Source   Medium   Keyword   Other +

Secondary dimension: Event Action    Sort Type: Default         advanced

| Source / Medium | Event Action | Acquisition |           | Behavior |             |                 |                       | Conversions    Goal 1: Form Completion ▾ |                                      |                                |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|----------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|                 |              | Users       | New Users | Sessions | Bounce Rate | Pages / Session | Avg. Session Duration | Form Completion (Goal 1 Conversion Rate) | Form Completion (Goal 1 Completions) | Form Completion (Goal 1 Value) |
|                 |              | ↓           |           |          |             |                 |                       |  |                                      |                                |

4. As you did with tracking, you can now use the secondary dimension section to further drill down on your results.

With UTM Code tracking, you can quantify your marketing spend, both in time you're dedicating to different channels and the monetary investment. If you're going to use UTM Codes, it's important to consistently use them and to actually review the results; otherwise, there's really no point.

While UTM tracking lets you find the final converting source, remember that there were likely many other stops along the way – so don't discount the other work you're doing just because you haven't attributed direct sales to it.







# New to Email Marketing?

## Try a Trusted Post-Stay Email Program that Works!

If you're not sure about getting started with email marketing, Travel Media Group can help. Our Reputation Influence program offers post-stay email campaigns that help generate positive reviews. Starting out with a simple post-stay email program can help you test if more advanced email marketing is right for your hotel.

**Get started today by visiting [trvl.media/reputation](https://trvl.media/reputation)**

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