Data Governance Guidelines for Marketing

What is Data Governance?

Data governance is a framework used by an organization to ensure that the correct, consistent data is informing our various functions. Rather than bringing in dirty data and trying to clean it and make sense of it later, there are steps we can take on the front end to ensure that data is collected in a consistent, uniform way, ahead of our marketing campaigns.

Simply Put:

When you put a link out into the world to market something – for a digital ad, an email, a social media post, whatever the medium may be – you need to have tracking parameters attached to it to clearly show in your data how your audience found you.

When Things Go Wrong

Here are some more examples of how inconsistency in tagging and tracking can create issues in datasets. (This is not exclusive to Facebook or social media; it's just one of the easier examples.)

Source/Medium

- belo / facebook
- workreadyu ESL / social
- (direct) / (none)
- workreadyu job training / (not set)
- facebook / social
- facebook / ppc
- m.facebook.com / referral
- workreadyu hse / (not set)
- l.facebook.com / referral
- facebook.com / referral

Why is Data Governance Important?

Consistency and Data Integrity

To ensure our reporting is correct, a strategy for data integration must be applied at the beginning of the campaign and it must be used consistently throughout.

What Can Go Wrong

If not tagged and tracked, results can be missed. Google Analytics considers Facebook, facebook, FB, and Facebook.com to be different sources. (Machines tend to be very literal). Without effective data governance, your traffic will be split, causing data integrity issues that will affect accuracy, reporting, and decision making. Cleaning up data at the end of a project is inefficient and ineffective, while a little time in the development phase of a project will help automate much of the work and support better results.

Campaign Tracking

If an analytics request comes in, without proper planning or after a campaign has run, it creates barriers to successful reporting. There are three primary barriers created when this happens:

1. Links may not be tagged consistently, so each campaign tag and/or link has to be reviewed individually to determine if it's tied to a certain marketing campaign.
2. Manually attempting to tie all data makes it much harder to be certain of the quality of the resulting data.
3. Reporting during a marketing campaign becomes virtually impossible and reporting must be delayed until after the marketing efforts are completed. Without regular reporting during the campaign, the strategist managing the marketing efforts is unable to gauge how things are going and determine if changes should be made mid-campaign.

Good Campaign Tracking:

1. saves hours of work trying to manually tie disparate pieces of data together,
2. ensures better quality data, and
3. can feed into a live dashboard to allow the campaign and functional ADs to monitor the status from start to finish and shift gears mid-campaign, remaining nimble based on the incoming data.

Setting Campaign Goals: Focus on Specific Behavior

While things like pageviews, likes, or email opens can be helpful to the marketing team, they generally don't qualify as adequate campaign goals. Campaign goals should reflect the behavior you want the user to exhibit – attend an event, register for an email campaign or complete an application.

If you are introducing a completely new service or product, awareness could be a valid goal. More often goals that show a true ROI, return on investment, are tied to a conversion or action on the part of the customer or student.

Even measuring items that show engagement – likes, shares, opens or even clicks – may still be incomplete without context.

Data without context has no meaning.

Pageviews don’t tell you anything about what users did once they landed on the page. Driving traffic to the website is great, but it’s not enough – what happened once they got there? Ultimately, there is probably a specific behavior you’d like to see users perform as part of measuring success for campaign, like clicking on a certain button on the page, calling a phone number, or going to the admissions application.

Getting 10,000 pageviews on something may sound impressive, but it’s the contextual factors – what the user did once they landed on the webpage - that will tell you if you were successful.

Zeroing in on a specific desired behavior sets a clear goal for your client and also helps set key performance indicators and overall campaign performance. For reporting, this means we are not “just pulling data” to show work that was done but finding “how many users called or emailed the admissions office from this ad?” to show effectiveness or to show that marketing helped move the needle. It also means clear goals MUST be determined in advance.

Campaign goals should reflect the behavior you want the user to exhibit – attend an event, register for an email campaign or complete an application.

What to Measure: Vanity Metrics vs. Actionable Metric

The term “vanity metrics” is used to categorize metrics that may look good, but don’t help the college make future business decisions. Actionable metrics can inform our strategy and show our ROI. Your goal may relate to a vanity metric – for engagement or awareness – but if you can’t take a specific action based on a metric then it doesn’t do much to inform the client on how effective the marketing campaign really was.

The following table offers some examples of vanity metrics vs. actionable metrics, but the difference is not always a hard line. Items listed under vanity – a social media ‘like,’ for example, may provide information to the social team about whether their content is getting traction. However, on a broader basis, likes are not data you can use to make decisions on the success of an overall multi-channel campaign, because they do not tell you anything about how many users converted or took a real action.

Vanity Metric	Actionable Metric
Trial Users	Converting Users
Page Views	Conversion Rate
Social Media ‘Likes’	Social Media Engagement/Referrals
Email Subscribers	Email Opt-in Conversion Rate
Leads in Sales Funnel	Cohort Analysis of Sales Funnel
Marketing Spend	Return on Marketing Investment
Total Students Acquired	Customer Acquisition Cost
Monthly Revenue per Customer	Customer Lifetime Value

Note: This is not to say that a member of the email team shouldn’t concern themselves with something like an email open rate, or that a member of the social team shouldn’t be concerned with social media engagement metrics. As subject matter experts in those specific areas, the teams can use this data to adjust and update campaigns to meet goals. For the purposes of reporting on campaign success to our clients though, those metrics don’t tell the client very much about whether their campaign performed as desired or expected. Our purpose is to move toward defining our clients’ primary **goal**, and then discuss what we can do to measure that and measure the right things to see whether we met that goal.

Behavioral Examples

Here are some of the main behavior/tracking goals (also referred to as conversions) the DX team already have set up on the Dallas College website.

- Users who went to the admissions application
- Users who went to the CE application
- Users who signed up for an email program, such as Tell Me More or the community newsletter
- Users who went to the Browsable Class Schedule
- Users who clicked contact information, such as an email address or phone number (phone numbers tracked on mobile device clicks only)
- Outbound clicks (anything that doesn’t contain dallascollege.edu or dcccd.edu)

These are great things to consider as you plan out campaigns for your clients. If you have a campaign goal you feel is not addressed by the above list, let’s talk about it – we may be able to figure something out for tracking that particular behavior.

UTM Parameters

In order to track all these actionable goals, sources and campaigns, we need to make use of consistent UTM parameters. UTM parameters are like tracking tags added to the end of links to gauge the effectiveness of marketing campaigns across traffic sources.

If you would prefer an audio/video explanation, try one of these LinkedIn Learning clips:

- Advertising on LinkedIn: Analytics, Tracking, and Attribution
- Google Universal Analytics Essential Training: Source and Medium Through Campaign Tracking

You can also check out the article UTM Parameters Explained: A Complete Guide to Tracking Your URLs & Traffic on the Search Engine Journal website.

One easy way to think about UTM parameters is to think about each link being a row in a spreadsheet and each UTM parameter being a column in a spreadsheet.

When applied correctly, you can easily sort, filter and tabulate the data in each column. When the data differs from one row to the next, it takes a lot of additional time and resources to properly tabulate your information.

Example:

https://www.dallascollege.edu/default/pages.aspx?utm_campaign=fall+registration&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_content=image300x200.jpg

Becomes:

Link	Campaign	Source	Medium	Content
https://www.dallascollege.edu/default/pages.aspx	fall registration	facebook	social	image300x200.jpg

What Campaign Parameters Should I Use?

You can view the current list of campaign parameters in the Marketing Network Team Site.

If you have questions or feel the need for additional campaign parameters, contact David or Maegan.

Campaign Parameter

The campaign parameter (sometimes referred to as campaign ID or campaign name) is the single-most important element to remember as you plan out projects for clients. A consistent campaign parameter provides the umbrella under which to house the tracking for each of the various deliverables for your campaigns. Campaign parameters are set between the Social Media AD and the Sr. Manager of Media Planning. A list of pre-set names is available in SharePoint, but if a new name is needed the Social Media AD and the Sr. Manager of Media Planning will create the campaign parameters and add these to the listing.

Campaign Parameter Conventions and Best Practices

Two things - Simple is better and Google Analytics is case sensitive.

Start with a simple, over-arching name that can be narrowed down further if needed.

For GA, the best practice for your tracking parameters is to lowercase everything. Seems silly, right? Just remember that Google reads your tags literally. That one detail is enough to create cardinality issues in the data between things like “Facebook” and “facebook.” The simplest rule to remember is “just lowercase it.”

Additionally, once you’ve designated a name for your campaign, that’s it. That’s the name you’re using. You cannot change it partway through.

“Good” Campaign Parameter Examples

- spring-registration
- fall-registration
- sustainability
- meningitis-vaccine-clinics

“Bad” Campaign Parameter Examples – (targets or specific dates shouldn’t be part of the name)

- fall 2021-reg not paid-081221
- meningitis needed-registered for fall-080921
- fall 2021-reg not paid-080321
- fall registration 2021
- fall 2021 reg-aug 4-spring students

As an example, between Aug. 26 and Sept. 4, 2021, we used 586 different campaign tags. Of those 586, at least 139 campaigns were related to Fall registration. Without consistent branding, someone had to manually filter and combine the data from each of these 139 campaigns and chances are high that some traffic will get lost or underreported.

Length/Number of Characters

While there’s no hard rule about character length you should use enough characters to accurately describe your campaign but keep it relatively short and easy to remember and use consistently for campaigns between various channels. Something like “sustainability summit” is going to be much easier to remember over “sustainability summit 2021 attendees and speakers target audience Dallas County Earth Day Interest.”

Source / Medium and Examples

Your **source** is the origin of your traffic. Your **medium** is the general category the source falls into. Here are some examples of source/medium and how they relate to each other:

Source	**Medium**
Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn Youtube	Social
Google Bing Yahoo Duck Duck Go	Organic
Adestra Salesforce Marketing Cloud	Email
Wikipedia dcccd.blackboard.com blog.dallascollege.edu	Referral

go2orientation.com mvclions.com	
Google Bing	cpc (cost per click)
Fall Registration Postcard QR Code Valpak QR Code	Print

Ad Content Parameter

This is typically where you're going to include a little more specific information about your ad. Most frequently, you see things like the graphic filename here for the ad, as in, "medoffice_300x250_dallascollege_spring2021.jpg."

It's not a requirement, though.

While your campaign parameter, source parameter, and medium parameter will usually need to stay consistent from a small list of options, the ad content parameter can typically be used for any information that might be useful to you as a marketer.

The same basic rules about campaign naming conventions apply – no special characters, keep it lowercased and try to keep it relatively brief.

Tracking Parameter Guidelines

Clean URLs

When building out campaign parameters, you should be using "clean" URLs free of any other tracking parameters. For Dallas College, that is usually going to mean the URL ends in something like .aspx. You may also come across a few web pages that end with .html or, in the case of a press release, ?ArticleId=79.

Here are some examples:

- Clean URL: https://www.dallascollege.edu/about/works/pages/default.aspx

- Not Clean URL: https://www.dallascollege.edu/about/works/pages/default.aspx?utm_source=shortcut-url&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=shortcuts&utm_content=work
- Clean URL: https://www.dallascollege.edu/news/pages/newsitem.aspx?ArticleId=110
- Not Clean URL: https://www.dallascollege.edu/news/pages/newsitem.aspx?ArticleId=110&fbclid=IwAR28GVN-chahsnetRe5G1UcKgyI6RtW_Rupefjegr5DS7YWXWGJxfZmD1L0&utm_campaign=dc%2Bsocial&utm_content=57aa26d370a948638d2d914eee13d343-37606645232&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook

If you're ever unsure about a clean URL, don't hesitate to double check with a member of the Digital Experience team.

UPDATE: Building a UTM; Use a - for Spaces

You should avoid using any special characters in your tracking parameters. You can use a plus sign, a dash or underscore to add spaces in the resulting reporting, but that's pretty much it. The reason for this is that some characters (like the ampersand or spaces) may break up your tagging in unintended ways, causing inconsistency/issues in the data that comes through. **Dallas College Marketing uses hyphens for spaces to ensure consistency across all platforms and underscore to delineate between elements under UTM_Content.**

Ad Pixels (Both for Dallas College and for Outside Vendors)

Pixels added to the website for advertising and/or remarketing purposes need to be evaluated every 90 days. This is to ensure that, once a pixel is no longer in use, it can be removed from the website promptly.

Other Good-to-Know Info

What *web data* we can collect

Web traffic via Google Analytics can only be collected from web properties we own or have access to. That includes properties like www.dallascollege.edu and blog.dallascollege.edu. You want web data from Amazon.com? We can't do it. Or to know who tunes in on your WebEx event – we can't track that either.

SharePoint Online is an area where we struggle to get strong analytics. If you or your client have access to a particular SPO area, you should be able to access this using the "Analytics" option in the menu toward the top of the page. The given data is usually very basic – page viewers, page views, time per user, and patterns by time.

Tracking Events on the Website

Event tracking and triggering **works from the time of set-up going forward**. If the appropriate tracking is not in place **before** the launch of your campaign, **there is no way to go back and get it**.

Working with vendors or agencies

When working with vendors, be sure they're following our tagging guidelines as well. They may want to include their name or other info in their UTM parameters, but as shown in the belo example, inconsistency with these standards can cause issues with our reporting.

Suggested vendor format: use the term parameter to designate which agency made the buy.

- ?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=name-of-campaign&utm_term=belo&utm_content=ad-filename-if-applicable

Additional Questions and Answers

Does this affect project/task naming conventions in WorkZone [or other internal tool]?

Nope! This is solely intended for links and web pages we market to outside of Dallas College digital properties.

Please continue deferring to team leads and Meridith as usual for help with WorkZone stuff.

We will be adding campaign parameters to significant campaigns in WZ though, so look to see if it's listed there.

Aren't some of these campaign parameters kind of obvious (depending on what it's for)?

Sure! But that isn't solely why we're creating the documentation.

A huge crux of this comes down to one thing: consistency.

If we've decided the campaign parameters for something is "fall-registration", then that's what we need to use – consistently and everywhere it's needed. Part of the reason for documentation is to help with maintaining that consistency, so there's (hopefully) no mix-ups and something like "registration-fall" or "fall-registration-2022" doesn't come along and create issues.

Social has those weird fal.cn links – are those tracked?

Yes! Falcon tags those links as the team posts.