

5 burning questions surrounding Apple's iOS 17 Mail, Messages, and Safari link tracking changes

Article

What's happening? **Apple announced in June** that iOS 17 would provide “even greater protections against trackers,” in a move that will affect links shared from Mail, Messages, and in Safari’s private browsing mode.

“Some websites add extra information to their URLs in order to track users across other websites. Now this information will be removed from the links users share in Messages and Mail, and the links will still work as expected,” **per Apple’s website**.

What does that mean? “When a tracking parameter is detected, **Safari strips the identifying components** of the URL, while leaving nonidentifiable parts intact,” Michael Hesse, privacy engineering at Apple, said in a video.

“Typical UTMs” like **source, medium, and campaign** will not be affected, said Allen Finn, head of life cycle marketing at ad solutions company Triple Whale.

What’s impacted? Click IDs with unique identifiers from Google and Meta will be impacted, but the changes only affect links accessed in Mail, Messages, and in Safari’s private browsing mode. Since users tend to access Facebook and Instagram links via the apps, the impact should be minimal.

That said, email and landing page creation platform Knak **ran a test on the impacts of these changes** and found that in certain cases, removing trackers broke the URLs.

What should marketers do? Run your own tests to make sure links aren’t breaking from Mail in iOS 17.

You should also familiarize yourself with Private Click Measurement, or PCM, which Apple is pushing as a solution for anonymous click attribution.

“[PCM is] a far cry from getting **rich attribution data from GCLIDs** [Google Click Identifiers] that used to reveal individual user activity, but it’s at least a lifeline for marketers who need some way of measuring ad performance,” Nicolas Grasset, co-founder and CEO of ad solutions company Peel, wrote in a blog post.

Beyond that, marketers should wait, said Ryan Phelan, managing partner at marketing company RPEOrigin. “Sit down and watch” the impact of these changes take shape. Phelan also suggested continuing to use clicks as a KPI for email performance, but “with an asterisk by it” as marketers see to what extent their metrics change.

What's to come? Phelan said Apple's end goal is unclear. Triple Whale's Finn made a bolder prediction, writing, "We predict that it's just a matter of time until Apple will eventually remove all UTMs, and we'll all be forced to adapt."

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