

Marketing Attribution for SaaS: The Complete Guide

A practical, opinionated playbook for connecting marketing spend to revenue

By Jason B. Hart • Founder, Domain Methods

I've spent the better part of a decade helping SaaS companies figure out which marketing dollars are actually generating revenue. And the single most consistent thing I've learned is this: **most attribution problems aren't attribution problems at all.**

They're trust problems. Data plumbing problems. Alignment problems.

The company spending \$80K/month on paid acquisition doesn't need a fancier attribution model. They need their CMO, CFO, and VP of Growth to look at the same number and agree it's real. That's a fundamentally different challenge than picking first-touch vs. last-touch, and it requires a fundamentally different approach.

This guide is what I wish someone had handed me ten years ago. It's the practical, opinionated playbook we use at Domain Methods when a client comes to us and says, "We don't know if our marketing is working."

Why Marketing Attribution Breaks at Scale

Attribution works fine when you're small. You're running a few campaigns, your sales cycle is short, and someone on the team can eyeball the data and know what's happening. Then you scale. And everything breaks.

The Numbers Stop Matching

Here's the scenario I see in almost every engagement: GA4 says you got 500 conversions last month. Your CRM says 380 new leads. Your billing system shows 42 new customers. Your ad platforms collectively claim credit for 700 conversions.

Which number is right? All of them. None of them. They're each measuring something different, with different definitions, different time windows, and different deduplication logic. And nobody documented any of it.

The Sales Cycle Kills Simple Tracking

If your average deal takes 90 days to close and involves six touchpoints across three channels, a single-session attribution cookie isn't going to cut it. The person who clicked your Google ad in January, read three blog posts in February, attended a webinar in March, and then had a sales call is not going to show up cleanly in any one platform's attribution report.

Siloed Tools Create Siloed Truth

Your marketing team trusts Google Analytics. Your sales team trusts the CRM. Your finance team trusts the billing system. Each team has "their" source of truth, and those sources disagree. This isn't a technology failure. It's an organizational one.

The Attribution Model Debate (and Why It Mostly Doesn't Matter)

The model you pick matters far less than you think.

First-touch, last-touch, linear, time-decay, W-shaped — I've seen teams spend six months evaluating these models. Meanwhile, their UTM parameters are inconsistent, half their form submissions aren't reaching the CRM, and their definition of "conversion" changes depending on who you ask.

What Actually Matters

Pick a model. Almost any model. Apply it consistently. Then focus your energy on three things:

Data completeness. Are you actually capturing the touchpoints? If 40% of your leads have no source data, no model will save you.

Data accuracy. When you say "Google Ads," do you mean all Google campaigns, or just branded search? Define your terms. Write them down. Make everyone agree.

Data connectivity. Can you trace a path from ad impression to closed deal? If not, you need a data pipeline before you need an attribution model.

The Model I Actually Recommend

For most mid-size SaaS companies: **first-touch for acquisition channel** and **last-touch for conversion action**. It's simple, it's defensible, and it answers the two questions that matter most: "Where do our customers come from?" and "What makes them convert?"

The 80/20 Approach: What Actually Drives Decisions

The 20% That Gives You 80% of the Insight

Here's what you actually need to track to make attribution work for a SaaS company:

Traffic source and medium. Where did they come from? Enforce consistent UTM parameters. Have a documented naming convention. Audit it monthly.

Key conversion events. Not 347 events. Five to ten, max. Demo request. Trial signup. Contact form. Whatever actions actually correlate with revenue.

Lead-to-opportunity connection. Can you connect a marketing lead to a CRM opportunity? This is the single most important data join in all of SaaS attribution.

Opportunity-to-revenue connection. When a deal closes, can you trace it back to the marketing touchpoint? This is where finance and marketing alignment either exists or doesn't.

That's it. Four categories. If you nail these four, you can answer 80% of the attribution questions your leadership team is asking.

Building a Single Source of Truth for ROAS

The architecture isn't complicated. The execution is.

Cloud data warehouse as the foundation. BigQuery or Snowflake — either works. This is your single source of truth.

Ingestion layer to get data in. Fivetran, Airbyte, or Stitch to pull data from your ad platforms, CRM, and billing system.

Transformation layer to make it useful. dbt transforms raw, messy data from six different systems into clean, tested, documented models your team can trust.

Reporting layer to make it accessible. Looker, Metabase, Preset — the tool matters less than the discipline of having one place where attribution reports live.

The Joins That Matter

1. **Ad platform data to website sessions.** UTM parameters are the glue.
2. **Website sessions to CRM leads.** Usually keyed on email or client ID.
3. **CRM leads to opportunities.** Requires disciplined CRM process.
4. **Opportunities to revenue.** CRM closed-won amount validated against billing.

Get these four joins right, and you have an attribution pipeline. Get any one wrong, and you have an expensive warehouse that produces numbers nobody trusts.

A Practical Framework: Connecting Marketing to Revenue

Step 1: Define What "Revenue" Means. Bookings? ARR? Cash collected? Pick one. Get your CMO, CFO, and VP of Sales to agree. This single act eliminates about 40% of the

arguments between marketing and finance.

Step 2: Map the Customer Journey You Actually Have. Not the one you wish you had. Be honest about gaps. Document what you can see and what you can't.

Step 3: Build the Pipeline Incrementally. Start with last-touch attribution on closed-won deals. Ship it. Validate with finance. Then layer in earlier touchpoints. Each iteration adds value and builds trust.

Step 4: Create Reporting Stakeholders Trust. Show your methodology. Make the logic inspectable. Build one primary dashboard that answers: "How much did we spend, where, and what revenue did it generate?"

Step 5: Iterate. Your first version will be wrong. Set a quarterly review cadence. Each iteration gets you closer. The goal isn't perfection — it's continuous improvement in decision quality.

Common Anti-Patterns

Tracking everything, analyzing nothing. 347 custom events in GA4 but only two informed an actual decision last quarter. For every metric, ask: "What decision would change?" If you can't answer, stop tracking it.

Letting perfect be the enemy of good. An 80% accurate attribution system that's live today is worth infinitely more than a 95% accurate system that ships next year.

Building attribution in a spreadsheet. If your attribution system requires a human to manually run it every month, it's not a system. It's a process, and processes break.

Ignoring the sales cycle. If your sales cycle is 90 days, don't evaluate campaigns on a 30-day window. Build a lagged reporting view. Compare campaigns on a cohort basis.

When to Invest in Attribution Infrastructure

Not every company needs a custom pipeline. But there are clear signals you've outgrown the basics:

- You're spending **\$50K+ per month** on paid acquisition
- Your **board is asking questions** you can't answer
- Marketing and finance are **arguing about the numbers**
- You've already **invested in a data warehouse**

If any of these resonate, the ROI math on proper attribution infrastructure works — usually within the first quarter.

Domain Methods • domainmethods.com

Marketing analytics, data foundations, and AI-powered activation for SaaS and ecommerce.

Book a discovery call: domainmethods.com/contact-us