Digital marketing metrics cheat sheet

Every formula in one place, plus the term pairs that cause the most reporting arguments.

Start with these twelve

If you are new to this, learn these before the rest. They cover almost every conversation you will have about performance.

Term	Formula	What it tells you
CTR	Clicks / Impressions	The share of people who clicked after seeing your listing or ad.
Conversion rate	Conversions / Sessions	The share of visits that complete the action you defined as valuable.
CPC	Spend / Clicks	The average amount you pay each time someone clicks your ad.
CPA	Spend / Conversions	What you paid in media for one conversion.
CAC	Total sales and marketing cost / New customers acquired	The full cost of winning one new customer, including media, salaries, tools and agency fees -- not just ad spend.
ROAS	Revenue / Ad spend	Revenue produced per unit of media spend, expressed as a multiple.
ROI	(Profit Cost) / Cost	Profit relative to total cost, expressed as a percentage.
KPI	--	The small number of metrics you have agreed actually indicate success.
SEO	--	The practice of earning visibility in unpaid search results, by making pages that answer a query better than the alternatives and that search engines can crawl and understand.
PPC	--	Advertising where you pay only when someone clicks, rather than for the impression.
Attribution	--	The rules that decide which channel gets credit for a conversion when someone touched several before converting.
UTM	--	Tags added to a URL so analytics can attribute the visit to a specific source, medium and campaign.

Which metric applies when

Getting seen -- "Is anyone seeing us?"

Metrics: Impressions, Reach, CPM

Watch out: None of these prove interest. Treat them as a denominator, not a result.

Getting attention -- "Is the promise compelling?"

Metrics: Clicks, CTR, CPC

Watch out: A high CTR with a low conversion rate usually means the promise oversold the page.

Getting action -- "Is the traffic the right traffic?"

Metrics: Conversions, Conversion rate, CPL

Watch out: Always state the denominator -- per session, per user and per click differ noticeably.

Getting paid -- "Did it make money?"

Metrics: CPA, CAC, ROAS, ROI

Watch out: This is the only row a finance team recognises. Report blended figures here.

Commonly confused pairs

This	Not this	The difference that matters
CPA	CAC	CPA is usually media spend only. CAC adds salaries, tools and overhead. A campaign can show a healthy CPA and an unprofitable CAC.
ROAS	ROI	ROAS is revenue over ad spend and ignores what the thing cost to deliver. ROI accounts for it. Strong ROAS with negative ROI is common.
Per-platform ROAS	Blended ROAS	When several platforms each claim the same sale, adding their reported returns produces a number larger than your actual revenue. Blended reconciles with the bank account.
Remarketing	Retargeting	Functionally the same practice. Remarketing is Google's term; the two are used interchangeably and nobody will misunderstand you either way.
Sessions	Users	One person can start several sessions. Quoting a conversion rate without saying which denominator you used makes the figure unverifiable.
Impressions	Reach	Impressions count times shown, including repeats to the same person. Reach counts distinct people. Impressions are always the larger number.

Every formula

Term	Formula
Bounce rate	Single-action sessions / Total sessions
Customer acquisition cost (CAC)	Total sales and marketing cost / New customers acquired
Conversion rate	Conversions / Sessions
Cost per acquisition (CPA)	Spend / Conversions
Cost per click (CPC)	Spend / Clicks
Cost per lead (CPL)	Spend / Leads
Cost per mille (CPM)	(Spend / Impressions) × 1,000
Click-through rate (CTR)	Clicks / Impressions
Reach	Impressions / Reach = average frequency
Return on ad spend (ROAS)	Revenue / Ad spend
Return on investment (ROI)	(Profit Cost) / Cost