



Fast track to the future

# How call tracking paved the way for more accessible marketing attribution

**Call**Rail

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# Introduction

Over the past decade, digital transformation has reshaped the ways consumers interact with businesses. New digital communication channels, including SMS (text messaging), social media, and online discussion forums, have dramatically increased the channels customers use to engage with companies.

Despite this technology-fueled expansion in the number of communication channels, telephone calls remain the primary means for customers to contact. Even today, [60% of consumers](#) prefer to pick up the phone — nearly four times more than email, the second-most-popular means of communication.

The challenges of 2020 have only accelerated this trend. As consumers sought information about changes in hours, revised safety protocols, or new offerings like curbside pickup, our research showed that the [average call volume in many industries has exceeded pre-COVID-19 levels](#).

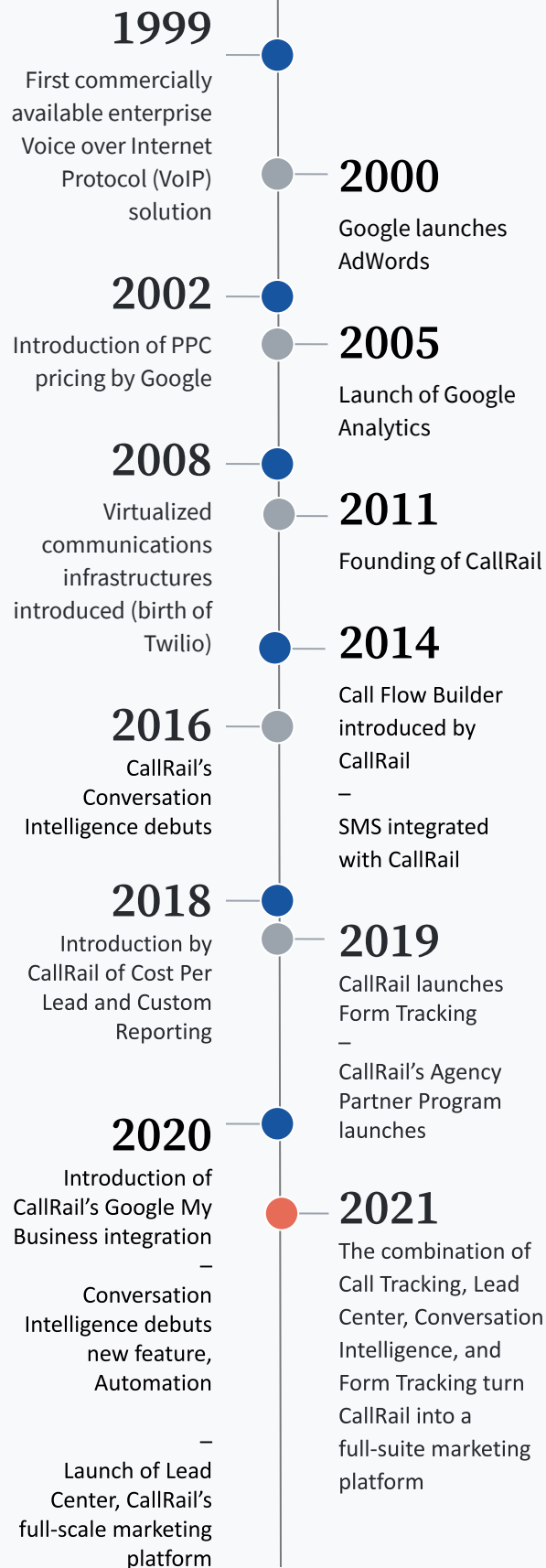
Digital transformation is changing more than the number and nature of channels where customers interact with businesses. It's also altering how businesses monitor and analyze those channels — giving them more data and tools to better understand how their digital advertising and marketing spend translates into real-world results.

In the past, call tracking tools and related analytics were expensive, cumbersome, and labor-intensive to implement, making them practical only for major enterprises. But today's call tracking technology puts accurate marketing attribution (i.e., knowing which campaigns are driving which calls/leads) within reach for small businesses as well. In fact, call tracking has evolved into an essential foundation — underlying a comprehensive toolset that's poised to transform how businesses of all sizes manage and communicate with leads (so that fewer slip between the cracks).

How did we get here? And where will these innovative technologies be headed next? As CallRail celebrates its tenth anniversary, we've put together this guide highlighting the history of call tracking, what it's made possible for businesses and marketers, and how it promises to evolve in the months and years to come.



## Call tracking timeline



The early years of  
call tracking:  
How'd you hear  
about us?

“Half of the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half.”

John Wanamaker

From the earliest days of advertising, companies have tried to figure out which of their ads were successfully generating leads. Efforts to determine the efficiency of advertising channels were mostly grounded in guesswork and “gut feelings.” However, without concrete information on the source of inbound leads, proving the ROI of any campaign was a challenge.

To help identify how ads were performing, call tracking began with employees asking callers a single question: “How’d you hear about us?”

Businesses were simply trying to understand what made the phone ring to correctly attribute value to targeted marketing campaigns. However, these early efforts at call tracking were manual — and not very reliable (most people aren’t very good at remembering exactly which billboard, radio jingle, or TV commercial prompted their phone call).

Eventually, technology began to play a role, and the first large-scale call tracking systems came to market. These relied on assigning a single business phone number to each individual advertising campaign. With this solution in place, it became possible to record — either by hand, in a spreadsheet, or, later, using automation, within the software — the number and duration of calls associated with each campaign.

However, this “new” technology-based form of call tracking was complex, expensive, and required massive investments in hardware and infrastructure, making it accessible only to major enterprises with major budgets.

## **A quantum leap: The impact of VoIP and the Cloud**

The nearly simultaneous introduction of a handful of new technologies at the start of the twentieth century redrew the boundaries of what was possible. The advent of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) enabled companies to save money on long distance and international telephone calls by sending voice data directly over the internet. Lower costs and greater geographical flexibility were only some of the benefits. VoIP's hardware and software capabilities quickly grew, allowing businesses to build high-performing company-wide telephone that delivered excellent call quality and advanced features without the need for lots of specialized hardware

At the same time, cloud computing enabled new economies of scale and service-based business models. Cloud providers made resources available on a cost-effective à la carte basis so that innovators could develop powerful software designed to be affordable even for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs).

“We started CallRail because we saw an opportunity,” explains Andy Powell, the company’s co-founder and CEO. “In the early days, we realized that it was newly possible to build something simple, powerful, and made in such a way that every business could use it. Back in 2011, there was no one out there making call analytics available to everyone, and nothing existed that was tailored to the specific needs of small businesses.”

Chief Technology Officer Elliot Wood at CallRail, adds, “The cloud is what enabled us to transform call tracking from something that cost \$500 or more every month to something that small businesses could actually think about adopting.”

In addition, it became easier and more affordable to obtain multiple business phone numbers. Lists could be purchased without embarking on costly and restrictive carrier relationships.



## Helping small businesses go big: CallRail's beginnings

Andy Powell, CallRail's co-founder, was a small business owner prior to starting the company. The vision that would eventually become CallRail grew out of Powell's intimate understanding of SMBs' budgets, marketing needs, and growth opportunities.

As the founder of a small marketing and advertising business, which operates an online lead generation platform for specialty auto repair shops, Powell realized he had no clear way to prove the value and ROI his company was providing to his customers. No affordable call analytics tools then existed that could accurately attribute phone calls to marketing activities.

Seeing an opportunity, he joined forces with Kevin Mann, a former classmate at Georgia Tech, who brought additional technical expertise to the endeavor. Each contributed a \$2,500 investment — for a total of \$5,000 in seed capital. CallRail was bootstrapped until it reached \$4M in annual recurring revenue (ARR). Today, CallRail is the [market's leading provider](#) of call tracking and related analytics.

The company's goal has always been to help SMBs better understand and improve visibility into their digital marketing efforts. "Small businesses are the lifeblood of America," says CallRail Director of Product Marketing Madelyn Wing. "They're what this country runs on. CallRail was founded upon a deep and abiding passion for helping small businesses."

As a result, CallRail has always maintained a consistent, intense focus on customer satisfaction.

# The impact of Google on call tracking

Between 2010 and 2020, digital marketing became a cornerstone activity. Cultivating a deeper understanding of which digital marketing activities were generating the most value was no longer a “nice to have.” Instead, it became a “must-have.”

As Google became the recipient of the largest share of digital ad spending, the online advertising ecosystem grew increasingly competitive and complex. With the rise of AdWords (rebranded Google Ads in 2018), pay-per-click (PPC) advertising became ubiquitous. And businesses of all sizes began shifting their ad spend from traditional media to online platforms. In 2020, digital advertising accounted for [more than half of U.S. advertising expenditures](#) for the first time.

In the face of these massive changes in global ad spending and the introduction of more intricate pricing models, it became critical for SMBs to understand whether their ad spend on PPC or Google Ads was actually driving the results they wanted. Furthermore, as Google My Business profile listings have been integrated with call tracking tools, it's become increasingly important that advertisers recognize how the phone calls they receive can be attributed to their digital marketing efforts.

“Google’s embrace of the call tracking industry has transformed call tracking from something that was beneficial in 2010 to something that businesses can’t live without today,” says Co-founder and Chief Product Officer Kevin Mann of CallRail. “The free dynamic phone number insertion (DNI) that’s now available with Google Ads has made call tracking easier to use, of course. But it’s also become more necessary.”

This is particularly the case for marketing and advertising agencies who must navigate the complexities of balancing multiple clients’ needs while ensuring that they’re making data-driven decisions and demonstrating clear ROI. Call tracking makes it possible to ensure that marketing investments are grounded in evidence and logic, rather gut instinct.

Wing recalls one marketing agency customer that had a client who was dead set on spending a great deal of money on Facebook and social media advertising, despite the agency’s recommendation that it wouldn’t be the best use of their advertising dollars.

## The impact of google on call tracking

“After implementing CallRail, and collecting just one month’s data, the marketing agency was able to show their client that the majority of their calls were coming from organic search,” Wing explains. “Based on the data, the agency was able to convince their client that spending money on updating their blog and attracting more traffic to their website would pay off much more than spending on social media ads.”

As the Director of Media and Planning at Swash Labs, Stephanie Delk has been working with CallRail for over eight years. She’s come to lean heavily on call tracking data to inform clients’ advertising strategies. “Even in just the past five years, this industry has seen so many innovations. Personalization has probably been the biggest. But to personalize marketing to the level that’s possible today, where you’re actually getting in front of the people that are most likely to use your services, you need very concrete knowledge,” says Delk. “We need to see the data to understand how things work.”

“Call tracking helps our clients understand where calls are coming from. Seeing how marketing efforts translate directly into phone calls lets them see the value of our efforts. There have been so many times when clients were skeptical, and call tracking gave us proof of attribution.”

Ryan Amen,  
Director of Client Success  
[Nifty Marketing](#)



## Call tracking becomes the backbone of CallRail's robust marketing platform

With Call Tracking as its foundation, CallRail has worked to build a robust marketing platform — one that can continue to evolve as the technology and industry evolve.

“We’re always looking to anticipate the next trend,” says Powell. “The most important thing I work on is trying to figure out where this market is headed. We’re constantly learning from and partnering with our customers to expand on our products. That’s how we’re constantly able to push the status quo while helping SMBs to improve their efficiency and productivity.”

Customers can use call tracking to track outbound and inbound phone calls (CallRail's core offering). But, they can also use call tracking in tandem with Form Tracking to get deeper insight into which marketing tactics led a customer to submit a web form. Together, these tools deliver more advanced attribution and analytics across a company's full mix of ads, campaigns, and keyword strategies.

**Call Tracking** is also the foundation for one of CallRail's AI-based offerings – **Conversation Intelligence**. This solution provides automated transcripts of all the calls recorded in **Call Tracking** and the ability to surface key findings from these conversations using artificial intelligence (AI). Finally, with **Lead Center**, a lead management and communications hub that allows customers to access all their calls, texts, and online forms from a single inbox, including the ability to place calls and send texts, CallRail has rounded out its robust marketing platform to give its customers a single place to keep up with *all* of their leads.

Nifty Marketing Director of Client Success Ryan Amen, who has used CallRail's service since 2012, notes that the comprehensive platform approach that CallRail has taken has given its products some of their biggest advantages. “It comes back to being able to connect all the dots,” he explains. “Anything that helps us better understand the whole customer journey — and see it in its entirety — is of great value.”

Product-Led Growth Analyst Jessica Spain — one of CallRail's first full-time hires — concurs. “CallRail is headed into the future. We’re thinking beyond just different ways to report on or analyze call tracking. We are thinking more broadly about lead tracking and lead data overall.”

## Meeting small businesses' needs with self-service call tracking

Before CallRail, call tracking solutions were geared toward large enterprises. Sales cycles were long, purchasing required extensive interaction with multiple sales team members, and costs were high. CallRail introduced a simple self-service sales model that enabled SMBs and marketing agencies to quickly and easily do things for themselves.

By adopting a self-service model, CallRail was also able to meet other SMB needs in a call tracking service, such as:

- Affordable pricing
- Straightforward onboarding
- Free trials that are truly free and don't require salespeople for setup
- Packages that are friendly to SMBs' budgets but can grow with them as they succeed

“We’ve been really happy with CallRail over the years. It was very easy to set up, and it’s still easy to work with. You can learn as you go, and it’s easy to scale and enhance it as you grow. If you’re an agency like us with 50 to 70 clients (ours are major hospitals), and you need to handle thousands of phone numbers, you’ll find it works great.”

Kevin Minelli  
CEO and Founder  
[Eruptr](#)



What the next  
decade of call  
tracking and  
marketing  
attribution holds

As “democratized” call tracking heads into its second decade, its role — and that of related analytics and technologies — continues to expand. Online interactions and digital experiences have an ever-greater impact on customers’ relationships with businesses, making it increasingly important to incorporate an omnichannel approach into every marketing and communications strategy. Consequently, marketers must also adopt an omnichannel approach to understanding which advertisement and messages – and which channels – played the greatest role in the purchasing decision.

Pull-A-Part’s Growth Marketing Analyst Sully Keel has seen this evolution from basic call tracking to a more omnichannel approach in his company’s call tracking efforts. “Our first solution for call tracking was to measure calls by marketing source for online and offline channels. But we have since changed the tracking for our online campaigns to record session-level data through website pools. Having session-level data enables us to understand more about how customers are flowing through our acquisition funnel and how we can best attribute our leads to marketing campaigns.”

What’s more, sales and marketing teams can no longer view lead generation and conversion as isolated activities. Instead, both form part of the customer journey and can and should be optimized together. To this end, a single, unified platform that tracks the full suite of communication channels makes it possible for SMBs and agencies to not only measure where leads are coming from, but to respond more effectively to individual leads and increase conversions.



As a result of these challenges — the need to move leads to sales faster and the need for visibility into which channels are driving leads — the industry of call tracking has evolved to keep pace. It now serves as the foundation of robust marketing tools for SMBs.

“At one point, I would have said the keyword data was critical to running an effective paid search campaign as a standalone. But as paid search methodology changes... the transcripts, keyword triggers, and forms, CallRail has evolved to offer have elevated the classic ROI conversation to align with what business owners really care about – generating revenue from quality leads,” explains Director of Marketing and Call Centers Lea Anne Roberts at Reliable Heating and Air, a CallRail customer since 2013.

Powell notes that for CallRail, the transition from call tracking to a full-scale marketing platform has been deliberate. “We don’t aspire to be a platform that only tells you what happened. We want to be a platform that helps you do things better. If businesses aren’t gathering data and analyzing their phone calls in conjunction with the other ways their customers are reaching them, they don’t have a complete picture of what’s going on with their business. We provide the visibility that our customers need, in ways that help them run more effective digital marketing campaigns.”

Delk from Swash Labs sees this evolution of CallRail as particularly beneficial for her agency because it's an all-in-one platform. "When you're dealing with medium-sized businesses, many of them work with lots of different solutions that do different things, but no one else has a solution that ties all the others together. CallRail is where you can go to see your forms, calls, and social platforms — all in a single place," Delk explains.

While CallRail may be taking the lead, the industry as a whole will need to follow in the same direction. Companies want (and need) an integrated, unified solution to track all marketing activities. With a hold in the healthcare industry, Eruptr's Senior Director of Sales Operations Steve Mosack (one of CallRail's first customers) says he's seeing a growing number of integrations among marketing technologies. CallRail's products include pre-built APIs that make it simple to link them with other systems, a trend that he sees expanding in the future. "Call tracking technology will eventually be able to connect right into the CRM systems of hospitals to give us a full ROI picture," envisions Mosack.



What the next decade of call tracking and marketing attribution holds

## What lies ahead: How call tracking has created new opportunities for marketing attribution innovation

“In the next decade, call tracking will continue to expand beyond just calls, to incorporate a truly holistic view of the business and how it appears to its customers. It’s going to become increasingly important to understand how to provide an omnichannel communications suite to SMB. But we’ll need to layer in intelligence so that it’s easy to figure out customer intent and identify whether a lead is really the type of lead they are looking for, even when they have a limited number of employees who devote time to marketing attribution.”

Elliott Wood  
CTO  
[CallRail](#)



“The future of advertising is personal. We don’t want to serve up a barrage of irrelevant ads. Instead, we want to make sure we’re getting in front of the people who will be good customers for our clients. Call tracking and attribution provide intelligent signals and indicators so that we can reach the right people – people who might never have stumbled upon us otherwise.”

Stephanie Delk  
Director of Media and Planning  
[Swash Labs](#)



“The number of platforms required to run a call center is going to shrink. This is already happening with CallRail’s Lead Center and features such as Call Flows. More businesses will use call tracking platforms as their single solution to run a call center due to the ease of setup and the benefits that come with housing call tracking data from marketing campaigns in the same ecosystem that call centers operate in.”

Sully Keel  
Growth Marketing Analyst  
[Pull-A-Part](#)

What the next decade of call tracking and marketing attribution holds

“Text messaging will increasingly augment phone calls as a means for customers to communicate with businesses. While phone calls are high bandwidth and synchronous, and web forms are low bandwidth and asynchronous, text messages fit nicely in the middle between the two. Text messaging hasn’t yet caught on as widely as we expect it will. That sea of change is still to come.”

Andy Powell  
CEO  
**CallRail**



“AI will be leveraged more and more heavily in the call tracking industry, especially for sentiment analysis. We receive as many as 46,000 calls each month. It’s not possible to listen to all of those calls to identify coaching opportunities or verify that we’re adhering to our customer service standards. One day sentiment analysis will be able to identify ‘frowny face’ calls in real time. Being able to proactively mitigate those without doing any heavy lifting will change how businesses operate for the better.”

Lea Anne Roberts  
Director of Marketing and Call Centers  
**Reliable Heating and Air**



## **Building on a foundation of success**

Every business, large or small, needs to understand exactly where leads are coming from to maximize the value of every dollar spent on marketing and advertising campaigns. Until the last decade, however, the tools that could make data-driven attribution into a reality were affordable only for a few of the very largest companies. Small and midsize businesses and agencies were forced to rely on intuition and guesswork.

As we move deeper into this next decade, it will become possible for even the smallest companies to make big decisions that are grounded in evidence and supported by data. Leveraging the power of the cloud and software's most advanced capabilities, tomorrow's call tracking solutions will be able to achieve more across a growing array of communication channels, and will do so in ways that are flexible, scalable, and cost-effective.

## Ready to experience the difference of a call tracking platform?

CallRail provides lead tracking and marketing analytics to over 150,000 customers, allowing them to drive better business outcomes from their digital marketing efforts and campaigns.

Start a free 14-day trial to see how.

[Start Free Trial →](#)

**CallRail**