

CASE STUDY

Airbnb improves vendor data collection to 90% with Google Tag Manager

The challenge of managing tagging complexity

Founded in 2008, Airbnb is a global travel community that offers end-to-end trips, including where you stay, what you do, and the people you meet. Airbnb’s accommodation marketplace offers access to millions of places to stay in more than 191 countries around the world.

Airbnb has a centralized product team that collaborates on marketing projects. The company uses a large number of website tags, including a unique tag for each of its multiple Google Ads accounts and more tags for an array of vendors, all measuring different types of conversions. To meet the needs of vendors, many tags would need to be replicated several times. At one point, Airbnb was running 88 different audience lists and 100 different tags. In order to prevent a bottleneck between the operations and marketing teams, Airbnb needed a solid tag management system. The first solution the company tried was unsuccessful — it needed significant technical knowledge to implement tags, as well as add-on tools for QA and reporting, and was too expensive.

Streamlined marketing through Google Tag Manager

After researching alternatives, Airbnb decided to shift its tagging to [Google Tag Manager](#). A number of factors contributed to the decision. For one, Airbnb already used several Google tools, so the move to the Tag Manager templates would be a smooth integration. The extensive QA and reporting features of Tag Manager would make it easier to locally test and deploy tags. And finally, because Tag Manager is free, it definitely helped the company’s bottom line. According to Maria Hwang, a lead on Airbnb’s online marketing team, standard setup was straightforward and didn’t take long to implement. Airbnb also built a data layer to allow the company to support Tag Manager and allow for remarketing.



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Mona Gandhi, Software Engineer, Airbnb

Cutting tag deployment from days to hours

In terms of alleviating demands on technical resources, it immediately became clear that the Tag Manager templates made it much easier for Airbnb engineers to meet the needs of the marketing and operations teams. Maria and her team can create tags from vendors on the fly, and send these to the engineering team to be implemented, which usually happens within two hours. “From a marketer’s standpoint, it’s way easier than ever before,” Maria says.

In the past, tagging was a back-and-forth process that would average two to three days to complete. “Previously, there were a lot of touchpoints, lots of room for error along the way,” Maria says. The laborious procedure included checking that JavaScript tags were correct and establishing QA before eventual deployment. Mona Gandhi, Airbnb software engineer, reports, “With Tag Manager, it’s a matter of an hour or so from receiving a tag to testing to QA to deployment. It’s exponentially better.”

The solution has also improved the ability to implement entirely new marketing strategies. Maria says, “We were able to expand to a few more Ads accounts, and Tag Manager makes it easier to consolidate all the tagging.” And thanks to Google’s pre-formatted tag templates from other vendors, the Airbnb marketing team can quickly and efficiently adopt new tags. Now, it’s simpler for Airbnb to try new tools, use more third-party vendors, and launch new advertising programs on any platform that needs website tagging.

Improved QA, reporting, data, and speed

Before Tag Manager was implemented, every day brought data issues thanks to tags not firing correctly. Mona reveals that, today, conversion counts are far more precise, and in-line with Airbnb’s internal data: The team can now collect vendor data for 90% of conversions. With this more accurate conversion data, Airbnb is now better equipped to optimize to a CPA metric than was previously possible. The result is an improved ability to manage the ROI of marketing activities.

Airbnb has also made extensive use of the Tag Manager preview and debug options, improving its QA and its ability to see which tags are firing on pages. Another benefit is that the Tag Manager JavaScript snippet is smaller than Airbnb’s previous solution, which means an enhanced website performance — a reported 8% improvement in page load time, to be precise.

The Goals

- Prevent bottlenecks between operations and marketing teams
- Implement tags fluidly
- Avoid unnecessary replication in tagging
- Minimize size of snippets to enhance performance

The Approach

- Implement Google Tag Manager
- Build a data layer

The Results

- Cut tag deployment from days to mere hours
- Increased site speed by 8%
- Faster launches of new programs, tools, and vendors
- More accurate data, better optimizations, better ROI