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MRC Lifts Viewable Impression Advisory for Display Advertising
Gating Period Remains in Place for Viewable Video Ads through June 30, 2014

In November 2012, the MRC issued a Viewable Impression Advisory, which advised the marketplace to refrain from transacting on viewable impressions as a digital advertising currency metric until such time that certain issues related to the measurement of viewable impressions could be resolved. Since that time, MRC and numerous other parties have worked diligently to identify and remove these obstacles.

Today, MRC announces that it is lifting its Viewable Impression Advisory for display advertising, effective immediately. For video advertising, MRC advises the marketplace to observe an additional 90-day gating period prior to beginning to transact on viewable video impressions. This gating period will expire on June 30, 2014.

Background

MRC initially issued its Viewable Impression Advisory on November 12, 2012 as a result of its findings from an industry wide pilot project that revealed there were significant measurement issues standing in the way of a seamless transition from a digital advertising currency based on served impressions to one based on viewable impressions. Most noteworthy among these issues was the inability of many measurers to determine the viewability of a significant percentage of ads, particularly those that appeared in cross domain I-Frame environments.

Addressing Measurement Limitations

In the intervening months since the Advisory was first issued, much progress has been made. Numerous viewable impression measurers have submitted their products to independent audit as part of the MRC accreditation process, and today 11 organizations are accredited by MRC for their viewability measurements. Also, measurement techniques have evolved, and innovative ways have emerged that have enhanced the ability of measurers to determine an ad's viewability in numerous challenging environments. While there remain differences in measurers' capabilities to determine viewability in cross domain I-Frame environments, these differences are narrowing. MRC requires accredited measurers to disclose their capabilities in this regard, and notes such limitations in a chart available at www.mediaratingcouncil.org. MRC encourages all users of this data to understand these capabilities, and to use the resulting data with this in mind.

Overall there has been a significant improvement in the percentage of ads for which the viewable status can be determined, and the percentage of ads for which viewability is undetermined has dropped precipitously from earlier levels. In short, the limitations on viewability measurement that initially led MRC to issue its Advisory have been largely ameliorated today.

Achieving Measurement Consistency

As noted in MRC's November 20, 2013 update to its Viewable Impression Advisory, a key remaining obstacle to MRC's removing its Advisory was accounting for differences in viewability measurements among vendors. Differences in viewable impression counts have existed, even among MRC accredited viewability measurers, and these differences needed to be reconciled to smooth the marketplace transition to a viewable impression-based currency. MRC and a group of accredited viewability measurers have been working on this issue over the last several months, assisted recently in a production test by a major digital advertising agency. As a result of this reconciliation work, MRC has identified the following reasons why discrepancies in viewability metrics may exist among measurers:

1. Granularity of measurements: Measurers may make viewability determinations based on sub-second "snapshots" of different lengths, and these differences can result in counting discrepancies among measurers. The forthcoming viewability measurement guidelines will specify 100 millisecond intervals as a minimum requirement for viewability measurement of display ads, and 200 milliseconds as the minimum interval for the measurement of video ads (in other words, 10 consecutive positive observations are needed to constitute a viewable impression).
2. Non-rendered served ads: In the course of its work on viewability, MRC has determined that served ads measured using a "Count on Decision" methodology, which is a method in which the count occurs relatively early in the ad serving process, often do not actually render on the user's screen in today's online environment. This can impact viewable rate calculations, as the served ad count is the denominator in this equation. Count on Decision has been considered an acceptable client-side counting approach since the issuance a decade ago of IAB's Display Advertising measurement guidelines, but it is clear that with the changes to the ad serving environment that have occurred since then, ads counted this way are particularly challenged in their ability to result in an "opportunity to see" the ad by the user. As a result, MRC intends to work with IAB later this year to revise the measurement guidelines for counting served ad impressions to eliminate Count on Decision as a recognized legitimate client side counting approach, and encourages measurers who use Count on Decision methodologies to migrate at the earliest possible time to an accepted client-side served ad counting approach in which the count occurs later in the process.
3. Order of Processing and Processes Applied: To further promote consistency in measurement, MRC has specified that the order in which the viewability thresholds should be applied when determining whether an impression is viewable is: 1) Space: determine that the 50% pixel threshold is met; then 2) Time: determine that the continuous second threshold is met. Also relevant is the fact that some measurers sometimes apply additional processes, such as ad verification procedures, to filter or otherwise exclude certain impressions from their final counts. The application of these additional procedures also can affect viewable impression counts. MRC has specified that certain processes that extend beyond viewability decisioning should be executed

separately and subsequently to the viewable impression count, which should lead to greater consistency in the viewable counts among measurers.

4. Ad versus Ad Container Measurement: Viewability measurers may differ on whether they measure the ad itself or the ad container (i.e., the I-Frame) in which the ad appears. While measurement of the ad itself is generally preferable, both approaches are acceptable. However, it must be recognized that measurement of the ad container involves an inference that the ad appears in the container as intended (i.e., the ad is properly sized, etc.). MRC will require measurers to disclose whether they measure the ad or the ad container, and, in the case of the latter, will direct the measurement organization to periodically study that the assumptions implicit in container measurement remain valid over time.
5. Out of Focus Conditions: Differences in how viewability measurers account for ads that may be in the viewable space of a browser window, but are in an out of focus browser tab, also can result in differences in counts of viewable impressions. MRC has specified that measurers should segregate such Out of Tab Focus ads from their viewable impression counts, and will allow accredited measurers a limited amount of time to adapt their systems to be able to distinguish these, if they do not currently have that capability.
6. Human Error: A primary reason for discrepancies in served impression counts through the years was human error, in operational areas such as campaign setup, ad trafficking, or other processes that required human intervention. Similarly, human error in viewability tagging or other operational processes can result in discrepancies in viewable impression counts. IAB issued guidance to the industry on this issue in 2008 with the publication of its *Ad Campaign Measurement Process Guidelines* document, and this document takes on enhanced relevance today, as many of the same issues that it originally addressed in the context of measuring served impressions are also applicable to quality viewable impression measurement.

MRC will require all accredited measurers to align their processes in light of the factors noted above. Accredited vendors will have 60 days to adapt their processes and MRC will be disclosing accredited vendor adoption of this reconciliation guidance as it is occurs at www.mediaratingcouncil.org.

As a result of the production testing that took place as part of the reconciliation work, MRC believes it will be reasonable to expect a discrepancy range of 5%-10% when comparing viewable impression counts among accredited vendors ***once they have adapted their production procedures to align with the guidance specified above.*** Implicit in achieving this discrepancy rate is that vendors have similar capabilities for measuring for viewability in cross domain I-Frame situations; as noted earlier, there remains some variability among vendor capabilities in this regard, and users should note this as they consider discrepancies in counts among vendors. It is expected that in time, these discrepancy rates will decline even further.

Release of Viewable Impression Measurement Guidelines Draft for Public Comment

MRC and IAB are about to release the draft version of the Viewable Impression Measurement Guidelines, which spell out specific parameters for how viewable impressions should be measured. This document is the result of a collaborative effort between MRC and a large working group organized under the auspices of IAB's Emerging Innovations Task Force. The

Guidelines draft, which has been in the works for more than a year, now will be circulated for a 30-day public circulation period, after which any necessary revisions will be made and a final version released.

Summary

With the aforementioned pieces now in place, MRC believes now is the appropriate time to lift its marketplace Advisory on transacting on viewable impressions for display advertising.

Because the final parameters for defining a viewable video ad were determined more recently (in January 2014) than those for display ad viewability, MRC believes that it is appropriate to extend a gating period of an additional 90 days before the marketplace begins to transact on viewable impressions for online video ads. This will allow time for additional analyses of the impact of the shift to viewable impressions for video, and is in line with similar periods of impact data that MRC generally looks for in comparable measurement transitions in other media. This gating period will end on June 30, 2014.

As a final note related to video viewability, certain buyers and sellers of online video advertising, especially within long-form video, trade using television-like “upfront” negotiation methods. In these cases a change to the currency of trading in these longer term arrangements may need to be aligned concurrently with negotiation phases, rather than at the June 30, 2014 termination of the gating period for viewable video. We encourage marketplace participants to strongly consider these logistical issues as they determine when to implement viewable video ad impressions within advertising transactions. This alignment and consideration would ensure a fuller understanding of the counting implications of the currency change in advance, rather than through a post evaluative process such as make-goods or other potential financial adjustments.

About the Media Rating Council (MRC)

The MRC is a non-profit industry association established in 1964 composed of leading television, radio, print and Internet companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and trade associations whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. Measurement services desiring MRC Accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research and other standards MRC produces; and submit to MRC-designed audits to authenticate and illuminate their procedures. In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the marketplace. Currently approximately 90 research products are audited by the MRC.

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