February 8, 2017

To: Digital Measurement Vendors Subject to MRC Audit

From: George Ivie, David Gunzerath and Ron Pinelli

Re: Front-End Invalid Traffic Filtration

Abstract: Measurement organizations applying front-end or pre-bid IVT filtration must:

- *Also apply required back-end detection and filtration techniques;*
- *Fully disclose use of front-end IVT filtration;*
- *Quantify the impact of front-end filtration if not included in Gross metrics; and*
- *Empirically support such techniques are as effective as back-end techniques they replace.*

Background:

On October 27, 2015 the Media Rating Council (MRC) issued the final *Invalid Traffic (IVT) Detection and Filtration Guidelines, Version 1.0*. The guidelines can be found here:

http://mediaratingcouncil.org/101515_IVT%20Addendum%20FINAL%20(Version%201.0).pdf

Within the *IVT Guidelines*, Section 4.2 delineates that Invalid traffic detection and filtration can occur early in an advertising transaction based on known conditions at the time ("front-end" also known as pre-bid) or may be applied after the transaction takes place based on backward looking assessment procedures ("back-end detection").

Each technique has certain strengths and weaknesses and both have a place in a well-executed traffic protection strategy. Measurement organizations should employ elements from both of these detection and filtration techniques on an ongoing basis, while minimizing the potential for their use to signal the detection methodologies to perpetrators of IVT.

While the MRC does not disallow front-end IVT filtration techniques (blocking of invalid traffic), we have not required them to be utilized due to the limitations detailed in the guidelines. Specifically, the increased risk of telegraphing detection techniques related to front-end IVT filtration not only leads to diminished effectiveness over time, but may also facilitate the creation of sourced traffic with characteristics specifically designed to defeat detection and filtration. Furthermore, back-end detection and filtration techniques are required for compliance with the guidelines. Digital measurement vendors employing front-end IVT filtration techniques must do so in combination with required back-end detection and filtration techniques. Use of front-end IVT filtration techniques must be fully disclosed and does not obviate the requirement to include in such disclosures a quantification of the impact on reported metrics of exclusions resulting from them.

If a measurement organization uses up-front blocking or identifies invalid traffic concurrent with ad-serving as part of its overall General and/or Sophisticated Invalid Traffic procedures (so there is a possibility this traffic would not be included in "Gross" metrics above) this practice should be known to measurement data users. Blocking or other exclusions that result from these practices should be quantified and disclosed if material and if not included in Gross metrics.

Finally, front-end IVT filtration techniques are generally probabilistic in nature as they rely on historical traffic patterns and heuristics to determine the likelihood that a bid request is invalid or valid as opposed to deterministic back-end detection techniques that utilize impression level telemetry to classify the validity of traffic. For this reason any vendor utilizing front-end techniques in place of one or more required back-end techniques must be able to empirically support that such front-end techniques are as effective as the back-end techniques they purport to replace. Such empirical evidence must be demonstrable and auditable via substantive testing and should be periodically updated.

This document does not apply to up-front blocking and alerting under the *IAB Ad Verification Guidelines* (non-IVT).

The MRC has produced this interim guidance based on input from an IVT Update working group and until such time as there is a formal standards update that incorporates it, this interim guidance is considered authoritative and should be applied by measurement services in the MRC accreditation process.

Please contact Ron Pinelli at MRC (rpinelli@mediaratingcouncil.org) with any questions.