



Guidelines for the Conduct of Ad Verification

**A Summary of the IAB US Document for the AU
Market**

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Background

Universal standards of measurement and highly accurate execution of digital advertising campaigns is imperative to the continued growth of digital advertising.

Trends in global advertising have given rise to discussion concerning accountability in the digital advertising market. Buyers and sellers across the Australian digital media landscape have been discussing ad verification and better forms of measurement. As a result, many international ad verification services have entered into the Australian marketplace.

With increasing adoption of ad verification services within the Australian and international marketplaces, this document is intended to direct media stakeholders to the existing body of work produced by the IAB United States (US) entitled 'Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Guidelines for the Conduct of Ad Verification, February 14, 2012', which details methods and common practices for Ad Verification. Additionally, it is intended to draw both buyers and sellers attention to pertinent aspects of ad verification services to help mitigate potential complications and misunderstandings.

This document was produced by the Australian IAB, in conjunction with the Media Federation Australia (MFA) and the Audit Bureau, in support of the existing IAB US guideline. The IAB US guideline originated from a project led by the IAB and facilitated by the Media Rating Council (MRC), with the participation of a large group of ad verification vendors, publishers, ad-servers, ad-networks, advertising agencies and other interested organisations. Additionally, this document established a special independent audit process whereby the practices and disclosures of verification vendors themselves can be validated.

Scope and Applicability

This document outlines how ad verification products and services may be used by various industry stakeholders such as Advertisers, Media Agencies, Media Owners/Publishers as well as Networks and Marketplaces. It is intended to provide a summary highlighting the standards developed by the IAB US and it also draws attention to pertinent considerations when engaging in the use of ad verification products and services.

Common commercial and operational issues can occur with the availability of varied services and degrees of application across both real-time verification and post-delivery verification tools. This document provides a summary of ad verification service lines and identifies common issues that media buyers and sellers should understand.

The IAB US guidelines promote transparency and consistent practices for ad verification in areas such as ad blocking, nested iframes and IP-based geo-targeting processes.

The IAB US guidelines establishes standards for the proper conduct of ad verification by service providers. This document highlights common questions and definitions with reference to the US documentation to aid in guiding communication between stakeholders and set standards of engagement where ad verification is being utilised as a method of measurement for campaign execution.

This document is not intended to provide standards for measurement, audit methodology or accreditation.

Ad Verification Overview

Ad verification is a way for media buyers to verify that the inventory they have purchased and is listed on an insertion order (IO) is fulfilling the contractual agreement between them (the buyer) and the seller.

The IAB US guidelines define ad verification as:

“A process which attempts to verify that one or more attributes of a served online ad have been executed in a manner consistent with the terms specified by the advertiser or agency and agreed to as part of the ad campaign terms”

1. Ad Verification for Publishers

Ad verification technology and services can be used by publishers to provide information and metrics about the supply of inventory on which they run advertising campaigns. Publishers can use this information to:

- Create a consistent form of measurement across the publisher’s accessible inventory
- Obtain metrics for ad verification service lines
- Attempt to verify that content supplied by third parties, partners and affiliates is brand safe
- Generate knowledge and understanding of how the publisher’s inventory is measured and reported by ad verification vendors

2. Ad Verification for Agencies

Ad verification technology and services can be used by advertising agencies to influence buying decisions, provide transparency and measure the compliance level of a campaign to contractual terms. This may include but not be limited to:

- Validation of delivered impression
 - Compliance with the target audience
 - Compliance with frequency and delivery of impressions during campaign period
- Transparency of site(s) placement
- Ad visibility
 - Above / below the fold placement
 - Frequency of ad delivery
- Audience / Behavioural targeting

- Ad blocking
 - Facilitate the prevention of ads from appearing where they are deemed not to be compliant with the contracted media buy. For example, where ads may be delivered to certain geographic locations or inappropriate site context.

3. Ad Verification for Networks and Marketplaces

Ad Networks and Marketplaces primarily use ad verification technology and services to verify if publisher partners are meeting their contractual obligation by ensuring the inventory they are supplying to the network or marketplace is brand safe. This is particularly important at the sub-domain level which carries greater risk of incorrect brand exposure.

Ad Networks and Marketplaces may also use ad verification technology and services to establish knowledge and insights about the performance of the inventory they supply at a campaign or insertion order level. This includes analysis on accuracy, timing and the details of blocked delivery.

The use of ad verification technology and services provides an opportunity for Ad Networks and Marketplaces to add value through the media buying process by promoting openness and transparency.

4. Ad Verification for Advertisers

Ad verification technology and services can be used by Advertisers to ensure that their media buy is transparent, safe and accountable.

Advertisers who engage a digital media agency to negotiate with digital publishers on their behalf should understand the policies and terms of agreement that the media agency is negotiating and agree on timely in-campaign and post-campaign reporting.

Advertisers who negotiate with publishers directly should ensure that publishers are able to show detailed reporting. This may include but not be limited to:

- Validation of delivered impression
 - Compliance with the target audience
 - Compliance with frequency and delivery of impressions during campaign period
- Transparency of site(s) placement
- Ad visibility
 - Above / below the fold placement
 - Frequency of ad delivery
- Audience / Behavioural targeting
- Ad blocking
 - Facilitate the prevention of ads from appearing where they are deemed not to be compliant with the contracted media buy. For example, where ads may be delivered to certain geographic locations or inappropriate site context.

Summary of Service Lines

Each service line outlined below is explained with generally accepted practices identified. Please note that nothing in this guideline should be interpreted as preventing the derivation and marketing of other types of ad verification services beyond the five service lines described herein. The IAB and MRC encourage the development and adoption of more accurate verification methods as they are developed. In fact, development of more effective methods over and above those specified herein is encouraged – see section 5.f of the IAB US Guidelines entitled ‘Other Service Lines Available’ for a general taxonomy or classification of ad verification service lines.

Site Context	Evaluates and reports the context within the page in which an ad appears. Where the feature is available, ad verification tools assess the context of the page against a list of parameters that were established by the advertiser and agency for the campaign. Generally these parameters are developed through consultation between the ad verification technology provider and the stakeholders.
Geo-Targeting	Evaluates and reports if an ad has been served to a user within the geographic areas(s) specified by the agency or advertiser within the trading terms of the campaign. These terms are usually established through consultation between the ad verification vendor and the customer and should be transparently shared with trading partners (publishers, ad networks).
Ad Placement	Evaluates and reports if ads are placed on page locations and in ad sizes/executions within the parameters of the terms specified for the campaign. These terms are established through consultation between the ad verification vendor and the customer and should be transparently shared with trading partners (publishers, ad networks).

Competitive Separation	Evaluates and reports that an ad is not inappropriately juxtaposed with a competitive advertisement, as defined in the media plan for the campaign.
Fraud Detection	Evaluates and reports fraudulent or potentially fraudulent activity involved in the serving of the advertisement.
Other	This guideline is not intended to hinder the marketplace development of additional Ad Verification service lines. The IAB US Guideline provides a general taxonomy that can be used to classify additional Ad Verification service lines as they are developed.

Common Issues

There are a range of common issues that can result in the production of inaccurate or misleading measurements reported via Ad Verification Technology and Services. The table below outlines some of the most common issues:

Geo data difference	Agency and Publisher ad serving technologies may use different vendors for geo-detection data compared to those of ad verification companies. Differences in how IP addresses are matched to geographic locations may result in discrepancies in geographic compliance as reported by the ad verification companies.
Disclosure of use	It is recommended at the time of initial campaign engagement, that all parties disclose their intended use of ad verification technology and how it will be applied. This will serve to enable correct terms of use to be clearly defined and the appropriate troubleshooting processes to be put in place in case of issues.

Data ownership / Data mining	<p>There are a range of concerns relating to the ability of media technology companies to capture data and cookie based information which may be later used for commercial benefit. It is recommended that all technology providers and their users transparently declare their data collection practices and its intended use.</p>
Ad blocking	<p>Some ad verification companies provide ad blocking services. These can result in significant differences between the delivery numbers reported by sellers compared to those reported by buyers. It is recommended that clear guidelines and terms of use be defined for the application of ad blocking services and be agreed prior to signing contracts.</p>
Access to information / Reports	<p>In the interest of openness and transparency it is recommended that buyers and sellers share the results of ad verification monitoring in relation to campaign execution. Ideally, access to the ad verification services or provision of scheduled reports should be provided.</p>
Ad visibility / Ad viewability / Viewable ads	<p>Ad visibility, also known as visible ads and viewability, is a process by which ad verification companies seek to measure if ads are determined to be within the viewable screen space of the browser and how long the user may be exposed to the ad. There are currently no agreed industry standards in place that governs what a visible ad is or how this should be measured.</p>

FAQs

a) What is ad verification?

A process which attempts to verify that one or more attributes of a served online ad have been executed in a manner consistent with the terms specified by the advertiser or agency and agreed to as part of the ad campaign terms.

b) What is an in view ad?

An in view ad is an ad that is visible to a user. This means that the ad must be in the visible portion of the page and the browser window must be in the focus of the user. In view ads are often referred to as viewable ad or impression and visible ad or impression.

Placement on a page, browser settings and scrolling behaviour, along with other data, are used to determine when and for how long an ad is in view. Ad verification companies may employ different methods to measure the results.

c) How are in view ads measured?

In view ads are primarily measured using client side JavaScript that measures a number of data points about the position and placement of an ad on a site.

The metric for defining an in view ad varies across the industry and is currently under consideration by the IAB.

d) What does above the fold mean?

Above the fold refers to advertisements or content that appear within the browser before having to scroll down the page.

The 'fold' is the most southern part of the page viewable by a user when a page initially loads. The fold position can vary depending on the hardware being used and the software settings of the individual user (e.g. resolution, font size, window size etc).

Content and advertising can be positioned above the fold and below the fold and is often used as a way to determine the likelihood of an ad being viewed. More details on the relationship between viewable ads and Above the Fold/ Below the Fold can be found within the IAB US definitions (pg. 5/29): http://www.iab.net/guidelines/508676/guidelines/ad_verification

e) Can ad verification companies block the delivery of ads?

Yes, some ad verification technology platforms have the capability to block the delivery of ads. This is highly dependent on how the ad verification technology is implemented.

The IAB recommends that Advertisers and Agencies notify their trading partners if they intend to implement ad blocking before the commencement of an advertising campaign (known as reactive blocking) as well as pre-bid blocking, as this can introduce ad impression counting discrepancies between the buyers and sellers. Reactive blocking serves a blank ad impression and therefore costs are still incurred from the adserver. Prebid blocking prevents the ad from going into auction, there is no ad call and therefore no charge to the publisher or adserver. It is strongly recommended that terms of use are agreed upon and documented within trading terms.

f) What impact does ad verification blocking have on campaign delivery?

In general, when ad blocking is enabled via an Ad Verification technology, it will prevent the delivery of an ad where the terms of the advertising campaign have not been met or where brand safety is at risk. It should be noted that in some circumstances ad verification technologies can generate false positives and as a result may incorrectly block some legitimate ads from being served. This can result in the publisher and agency's 3rd party ad serving solution reporting different impression numbers.

g) Why does my verification system report different geographic targeting numbers to my adserver?

Geo targeting discrepancies between systems may be caused by a number of contributing factors, the most significant of which is the geo targeting IP datasets provided by third party vendors. If different vendors are used, the discrepancy threshold should be eased to accommodate potentially legitimate results.

Other contributing factors include:

- The accuracy of IP datasets. The source of discrepancy may be due to the frequency of applying updates.
- Vendors have differing results for granular geo targeting. For instance results for the country would be more accurate than a city / suburb.

h) How accurate is the information reported by the ad verification companies compared to my adserver or analytics or internal measurements?

Ad serving and ad verification technology companies employ their own technology solutions to capture and measure activity. These systems are all designed and built differently; as a result

they may not report the same information when measuring the outcomes of the same campaign.

It is strongly recommended that each party seeks to understand the relative accuracy that each tool set reports, in relation to their own environments, before using them to measure the success of campaigns.

i) Can Ad Verification services be used to determine the URL of the page and site context that an ad placement was served into?

Yes, some ad verification services have the ability to determine the context in which ad placements are served. This may include the site’s URL and the contextual nature of the page content. However, ad verification technology services may not be able to check the URL of a site or the site context under certain circumstances. For example, if the impression is served using nested iframes.

j) What are the most common causes of counting discrepancy with ad verification tools?

Service Lines	Reason for discrepancy	Potential / impact
Site Context	Inaccurate page information or meta data Site layout Ad verification Technology method	Inappropriate site context Incorrect audience Brand safety at risk Campaign at risk
Geo Targeting	Geo Database Ad verification methodology	Incorrect geographic targeting Incorrect audience Campaign at risk
Ad Placement	iframes Page structure Ad verification methodology	Incorrect location of ads Ads not viewed Campaign at risk
Competitive Separation	Ad-serving technology Trafficking error Ad verification methodology	Ads juxtaposed with competitors inappropriately Campaign at risk Brand protection risk
Fraud Detection	Ad verification methodology	Deceptive delivery of ads Ads not seen by audience Wrong ad spend Campaign at risk
Other	Ad verification methodology	Brand safety at risk Campaign at risk

k) How should I set about resolving issues or discrepancies if they arise?

The IAB recommends that buyers and sellers engage in transparent conversation prior to entering into contractual arrangements to determine if and how ad verification tools will be used and how issues or discrepancies will be resolved should they arise. These should be added to into contractual agreements prior to use.

It is also recommended that there is open dialogue between buyers, sellers and ad verification companies to ensure there is transparent sharing of campaign related data.

l) Do ad verification companies collect data?

Ad verification technology companies collect a range of information about the campaigns they monitor. This is typically used to provide reporting and insights about the advertising campaign that is being measured. The extent of data collection and the ways in which this data is used, varies by ad verification technology company. It is recommended that agencies and publishers seek clarification on these issues from ad verification companies before engaging their services.

m) What are the typical features / functions of ad verification technology?

- Alerts for offensive or blacklisted sites
- Blocking of ad delivery where the ad context does not match the conditions of the media buy
- Measurement of the position of an ad e.g. above or below the fold
- Verify audience targeting
- Verify geographic targeting
- Verify day part targeting, delivery pacing
- Verify frequency capping
- Verify competitive separation
- Verify if multiple ads from within the same campaign or advertiser are serving on the same page at the same time
- Verify view through rate for video ads

n) Do all publishers allow ad verification to be used across their sites?

Some publishers have adopted and actively use ad verification tools to allow them to set benchmarks for performance and to monitor brand safety. There are incremental costs involved in running ad verification tools and so usage may be limited to a representative sample of overall inventory.

Not all publishers permit the use of ad verification technology across their sites. Some publishers permit only limited application of the tools and information they provide.

Please also note that publishers that permit the use of ad verification technology may not allow the technology from all ad verification vendors to be used.

o) As an Agency, who do I engage if I have a problem implementing ad verification code?

Agencies should primarily work with their Ad Verification technology provider to establish how to implement the tools. It is also recommended that media partners are consulted before Ad Verification Services are implemented to ensure that all parties involved agree with their intended use.

p) Who uses ad verification?

Ad Verification Services can be used by any segment of the online advertising community including Advertising Agencies, Advertisers, Publishers, Networks and Platforms.

q) What is the typical implementation process for ad verification?

Agencies or advertisers will select a preferred ad verification partner with whom to work. The IAB recommends that agencies and advertisers engage ad verification companies who are currently actively working with the IAB US to create standards and guidelines for ad verification.

http://www.iab.net/guidelines/508676/guidelines/ad_verification

Each ad verification company operates slightly differently, however generally upon campaign engagement they will:

- Work with the advertiser or agency to establish what it is they wish to measure
- These requirements are then used to establish the measurement terms for the campaign and then configured accordingly in the respective ad verification technology
- The ad verification vendors will then usually supply an ad verification tag to the Advertiser or agency, which will then be implemented within the publisher or ad network in conjunction with the campaign creative
- The ad verification company then monitors the activity generated by the tag and provides a level of reporting that indicates if the campaign ad verification objectives are being met

Definitions from the IAB US Document

Above the Fold / Below the Fold: Advertisements and content can appear Above the Fold or Below the Fold for each page load. The “fold” has traditionally been considered where the initially-loaded viewable space of the page ends – so advertisements and content above the fold was considered likely to be viewable upon load and content below the fold was considered necessary to scroll to in order to be viewable. In reality, the location of the fold, and consequently the viewability of advertising and content, is variable based on the browser settings of the user (resolution, font size, window size, etc.) and there are generally four locations (top, bottom, left and right sides) where advertising and content may be cut off from viewability based on user actions and settings. Upon initial page load, advertising or content placed at the top and left side of the page are most likely to be viewable, however this can change if content or ads are obscured by overlays or with further user action (scrolling) coupled with latency; therefore, placement and viewability are separate attributes to be assessed.

Ad Blocking: A decision made by the ad verification service on behalf of the verification client (generally a marketer / advertising agency) to prevent an advertisement from appearing on a page based on specified criteria applied by the ad verification service, agreed to in advance as documented in the terms and conditions of the campaign.

Ad Exchange: A platform for buying and selling online advertising inventory.

Ad Network: A broker for buying online advertising inventory across sites and managing online advertising campaigns.

Ad Placement: Refers to the placement of the ad (or ad-group) on a web page, including attributes such as the positioning of where an ad appears on the page, the size and orientation of the ad as it appears on the page, and possibly other characteristics as specified in the campaign terms (e.g., frequency capping, share of voice, road blocks). Ad placement can be applicable to more than one ad unit served at a time (an ad-group).

Ad Verification: A process which attempts to verify that one or more attributes of a served online ad have been executed in a manner consistent with the terms specified by the advertiser or agency and agreed to as part of the ad campaign terms.

Ad Verification Service: An entity that performs ad verification processes.

Competitive Separation: Refers to the condition on some ad campaigns that ads do not appear within certain proximity of other ads for competing products or advertisers, or other ads from which separation is desired by the advertiser. These separation parameters should be clearly specified as part of the terms of the campaign.

Compliant Ad: Ads served that meet the terms of an insertion order, media plan and other custom specifications provided by the verification client (generally a marketer/advertising agency).

Fraud: An intentionally deceptive practice designed to manipulate legitimate ad serving or measurement processes or create fictitious activity that leads to inflated counts. In the context of ad verification, two types of fraud can be encountered – Placement Fraud and Fraudulent Traffic. Placement Fraud manipulates serving activity so ads are measured when they are not viewable or served within operationally usable parameters. Fraudulent Traffic is machine generated traffic which is not observable by a user that increments ad measurements inappropriately.

As used in this Guideline, Fraud is not intended to represent fraud as defined in various laws, statutes and ordinances or as conventionally used in U.S. Court or other legal proceedings, but rather a custom definition strictly for advertising measurement purposes.

Geo-Targeting: Refers to the serving (or non-serving) of ads to users in specific geographic locations, as far as these locations can be determined. User IP addresses are among the methods used to assign geographic location to users.

iframe: The sections of a website/webpage that display ads served from a third party ad server that limits the access of that ad server solely to the code of the page. IFrames can be nested, essentially creating a “chain” of serving instances from serving partners. An iframe associated with a placement where the ad tag is located on an HTML document loaded from a domain other than the domain of the document on which the iframe was rendered is called a nested iframe, blind iframe or cross-domain iframe.

Publisher: An individual or organization that prepares issues and disseminates content for public distribution or sale via one or more media.

See through Rate (Ad visibility, view through): The rate at which an Ad Verification process can observe (and therefore verify) the ultimate content contained within iframes, including nested iframes. If only a sample of impressions is used in calculating the see through rate, it should be called a “projected see through rate.”

Seller Organization: As used in this document, this refers to a seller of online advertising. This may be a publisher, an ad network, an ad exchange, or other platform through which online ads may be sold (or re-sold). Seller organization properties are typically the subject of ad verification processes.

Site Context: Refers to certain attributes of a web page or web site that are used as determinants as to whether the page to which the ad is to be served represents an appropriate environment in which the ad should appear, as determined by parameters set by the advertiser. For example, an advertiser may set certain parameters as part of the campaign terms to prohibit serving its ad to adult-oriented pages or sites, sites containing hate speech, or sites that provide or enable illegal access to copyrighted materials.

Tracking Technology: Technology, embedded within an advertisement, to perform census-based campaign measurement functions. When an advertisement containing the tracking technology is served on a publisher’s web site, the tracking technology enables an ad verification system to identify certain information related to the transaction, for example: (1) the page URL where the ad was served and (2) the IP address of the browser to which the advertisement was served.

Viewability: Whether the ad was contained in the viewable space of the browser window based on pre-established criteria such as the percent of ad pixels within the viewable space and the length of time the ad is in the viewable space of the browser.

Boarding functions should be offered periodically and upon significant turnover of responsible customer personnel.

References

Interactive Advertising Bureau and the Media Ratings Council: Guidelines for the Conduct of Ad Verification. USA: IAB US, 2012. Online.

http://www.iab.net/media/file/Ad_Verification_Conduct_Guidelines_2012.pdf

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