

Digital Brand Ad Effectiveness Research Best Practice Guidelines & Checklist.

Originally Released November 2009, Updated September 2013

Background

Since the first publication of these guidelines in 2009, advertisers have continued to embrace digital media as a branding medium. It is now well documented that just reviewing click through data on display advertising is not an effective way of measuring the impact of a branding campaign. Growing awareness and more sophisticated approaches to planning and executing online advertising campaigns have meant the demand for advertising effectiveness research is becoming the norm.

This increasing utilisation of digital brand ad effectiveness research has meant that web site audiences are being exposed to studies more frequently and this can hinder their media experience which is of importance to both publishers and advertisers. It can also impact on the quality of the research results. Brand effectiveness studies are complicated, there are a lot of moving parts and simple errors can invalidate the results.

The Digital Brand Ad Effectiveness Research Best Practice Guidelines & Checklist have been drawn up by the IAB Measurement and Research Councils to ensure that research requested by media agencies and clients is mutually beneficial and is conducted as effectively as possible. The following aims to outline some of the key aspects for consideration when planning and setting up online advertising effectiveness.

This document is in line with the IAB US Checklist for Improving Online Ad Effectiveness Studies released in July 2012.

When Should Brand Effectiveness Research Be Conducted?

The following gives some examples of the most common circumstances under which an ad effectiveness study is utilised:

- The overriding objective of the campaign is to drive offline purchases, increase brand awareness and/or change brand perceptions.
- As part of an ongoing brand tracking study.
- When a campaign is of sufficient weight/duration to affect clearly defined brand metrics.

Considerations such as future intention to purchase or trial of a product can be covered in advertising/brand effectiveness work if it is coupled to brand awareness.

Methodology

There are two main recommended approaches to this type of research, Pre and Post or Control and Exposed testing. Control and Exposed testing is the preferred design if possible.

Pre & Post

- Research is carried out before and after the campaign is live.
- The difference between pre and post measurement is given as the effect of the campaign.
- This is the most frequently used methodology for measuring sponsorship, high share of voice campaigns or campaigns where an element of the activity is not ad served.
- The survey is conducted prior to campaign launch and again after the campaign has reached its end. In some cases a mid campaign 'dip' can be used, this is particularly applicable if a campaign is running over a long time period.
- The differences between the pre and post (or pre, mid and post) are deemed as the impact of the campaign. However changes in any other related marketing activity during this period must be taken into account when assessing the results.
- This approach is useful in isolating the online campaign uplift when there has been an ongoing offline campaign and a high baseline of existing awareness.
- The approach is also useful in tracking other forms of advertising, for example, sponsorship or custom microsites where access to allow 'tagging' at the programming level is not available.

Test & Control (Exposed and Not Exposed)

- A cookie is dropped from the creative into the browser of the user exposed to the campaign.
- Respondents are identified as exposed to the campaign (test sample) due to the presence of the cookie and are compared to those not exposed (control).
- Simultaneous collection of exposed and non-exposed responses can allow studies to isolate the impact of online media as both groups have had equal opportunity to be exposed to other media.

The IAB recommends working with a vendor who is experienced in running digital brand ad effectiveness studies and are AMSRO compliant. These studies are for research purposes only and the cookie tracked audience data is not to be used for any other purpose beyond the original study.

Publishers have certain legal commitments to their audience with respect to how their data will be collected and used. It becomes difficult for website operators to comply with their privacy policies and any self-regulatory obligations if audience data is being collected and used by third parties without their knowledge or consent. Further information on data usage will be published by IAB Australia in October 2013.

The checklist below is designed to help agencies and advertisers prepare for a study and obtain meaningful valid results that can be used for their business.

This document has been prepared by the IAB Measurement and Research Councils and with consultation with the MFA, AANA and major research vendors.

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DIGITAL BRAND AD EFFECTIVENESS RESEARCH CHECKLIST

PRE-SELECTION - CHECKLIST

Campaign Size/Feasibility: Is the campaign large enough to get measurable statistically significant sample? Recruitment methods and response rates vary by site so thresholds will differ widely. Experience vendors and publishers typically have the most reliable data about completion rates. Studies should only be conducted for campaigns that meet that threshold.

Publisher Approval: Ensure that the sites where you plan to run the study have approved it and are prepared to implement necessary tags. Implementation requirements vary by site, in order to guarantee that a campaign can be measured, approval must be obtained before an IO is assigned and at least 2 weeks prior to study launch (2 weeks prior to campaign launch for simultaneous control, 4 weeks prior to launch for pre-control). Cross media studies may need a longer approval period – liaise with your research vendor and all media companies involved to assess this.

Media agencies should be aware that media owners are now subjected to a high volume of research requests and face serious issues of over-burdening site users with questionnaires. A publisher may refuse to run a study if there is a conflict with other research being run on the same environment or audience. Publishers may seek to approve survey content before it is served on their site. For studies run via site intercept or flyover, creative executions are to be reviewed by publishers to ensure that there is a good creative fit for the site and to help minimise audience disruption.

Fit: Does the study fit the objective? Are the correct metrics being measured?

Incentives: Incentives can be used, but consideration should be given to any potential bias this might cause. They may also serve to attract the 'serial' respondent.

SET UP – CHECKLIST

Matched Control Sample: True experimental design (random recruitment of control/exposed from the same placements) is the gold standard. When this design is not possible, the control should run in the same areas as the campaign and should be targeted to the same audiences. Any remaining differences in sample composition should be adjusted during post-campaign weighting.

Recruitment Plan Matched to Media Plan: Respondents should be recruited from placements/sites in proportion to their weight in the media plan and should be recruited evenly across the course of the campaign.

Ad Bias Prevention: No other ads should be on the screen while the survey is taking place.

Consistent Set-Up Across Sites: Base survey design and exposure lag must be consistent between sites to ensure that results are comparable.

Consistent Tagging: Swapping creative can be operationally challenging; if creative changes throughout the campaign ensure that tags are implemented immediately and correctly.

Representative Placement Measurement: The survey must be able to measure all aspects (all units) of the campaign.

Management of Time from Exposure to Survey: If respondents are surveyed directly after exposure, results should only be compared to other surveys with the same time lag.

Survey Length Maximums: The survey should be kept as short as possible (20 questions or 10 minutes max, whichever is shorter) to keep response rates up and minimise respondent fatigue; mobile studies should be 12 questions max.

Demographic Match to Campaign: Site intercepts recruits a random sample of those exposed to a campaign directly from the site, the base pool of respondents in a panel must be set up to represent the composition of the site and the respondents who are recruited should be representative of those exposed to the campaign.

REPORTING – CHECKLIST

Control/Exposed Weighting: The only differences between the control and exposed groups should be exposure to the campaign; therefore the groups should be matched on as many variables as possible, including: demographics, category behaviour, site visitation and any other targeting variables that have been implemented. In absence of experimental design, it is impossible to account for 100% of the variance between cells but best efforts should be made to match on known biasing variables.

Placement/Frequency Weighting: The exposed group should be representative of where and when the campaign ran, if the recruitment wasn't even by site, placement or frequency, the results should be weighted.

Sample Size: Opinions varies on thresholds but N=50 is the absolute minimum sample that should be statistically tested or used for analysis. A sample of N=50 per site and/or sub-group is needed to adequately weight the results by site, demo or behaviour as weighting relies on stable data for each component of the scheme.

Statistical Significance: 90% or 95% are standard confidence levels for significance.