



UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED:  
**'COUNT-ON-BEGIN-TO-RENDER'  
AD MEASUREMENT MODEL**

VERSION 1.0 | OPEN FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

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# BACKGROUND

*Served impressions has always been the industry standard for measuring the delivery of digital advertising. However, the methods and rules for counting served impressions has often differed amongst the different ad serving technologies, resulting in numerous discrepancies across the industry. The industry has changed significantly over the years and the IAB and MRC are now pushing for a change in the way impressions are counted and billed upon.*

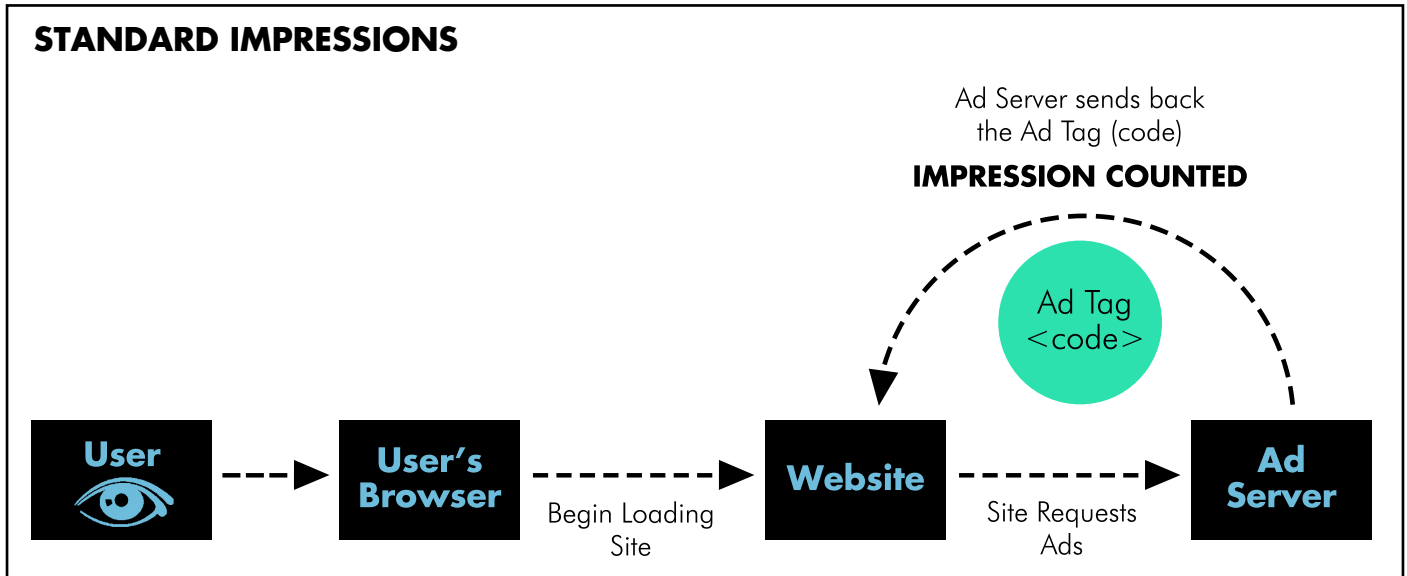
In November 2016 Google announced they would provide a downloaded impression metric to DFP customers and soon this metric would become the new standard for impression counting. ‘Begin to Render’ or ‘Downloaded’ impressions appear to be a happy medium between served impressions and the harder-to-achieve viewable impressions. Regardless, publishers will need to work harder to deliver on their client’s requests.

Achieving a downloaded impression is decidedly more dependent on the advertisers and agencies involved. As such publishers will need to apply restrictions to ensure “fairness” is achieved on all sides.

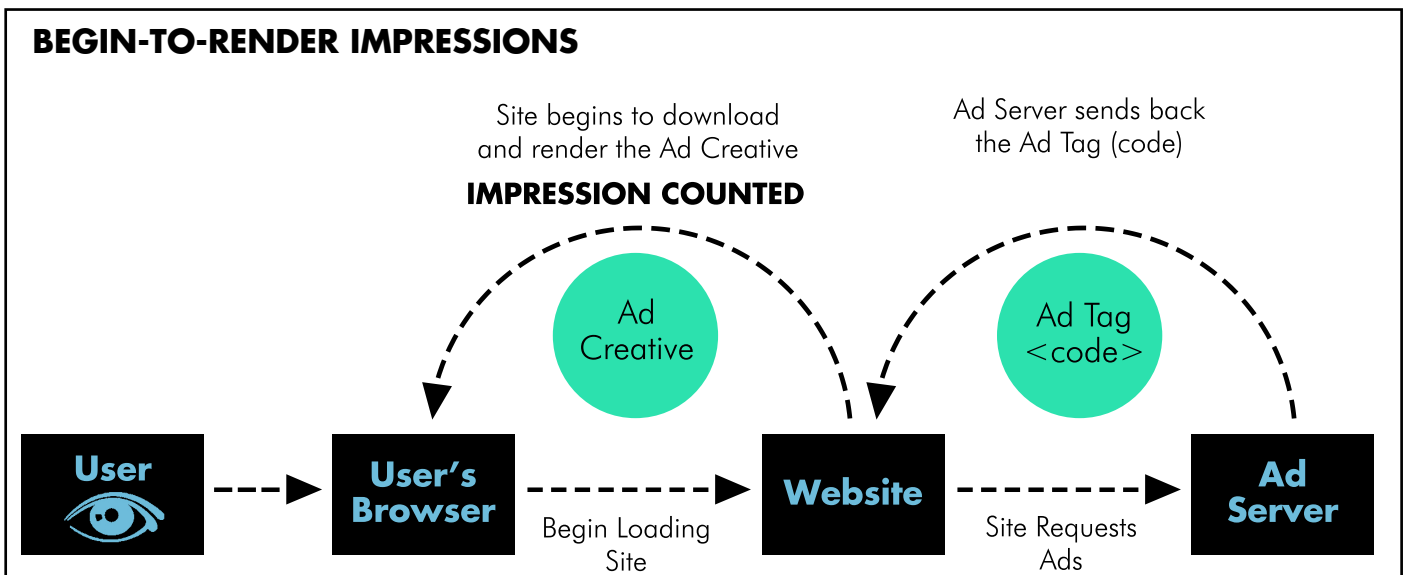
## ‘BEGIN-TO-RENDER’ – A DEFINITION

Standard Impressions	Begin-to-Render Impressions	Viewable Impressions
<p>The ad impression is counted as soon as the site receives the ad tag script from the ad server. This method does not consider when the ad itself begins or finishes to load, nor whether the ad was “viewable” by the user.</p>	<p>Measured via the responses from an ad server to an ad request from the user’s browser, recorded as late as possible in the process of delivery of the creative material to the user’s browser. The ad must be loaded and at minimum begin to render in order to count as a valid rendered impression. This could be the middle-ground between standard and viewable counting methods.</p>	<p>Measured via the responses from an ad server to an ad request from the user’s browser, recorded as late as possible in the process of delivery of the creative material to the user’s browser. The ad must be loaded and at minimum begin to render in order to count as a valid rendered impression. This could be the middle-ground between standard and viewable counting methods.</p>

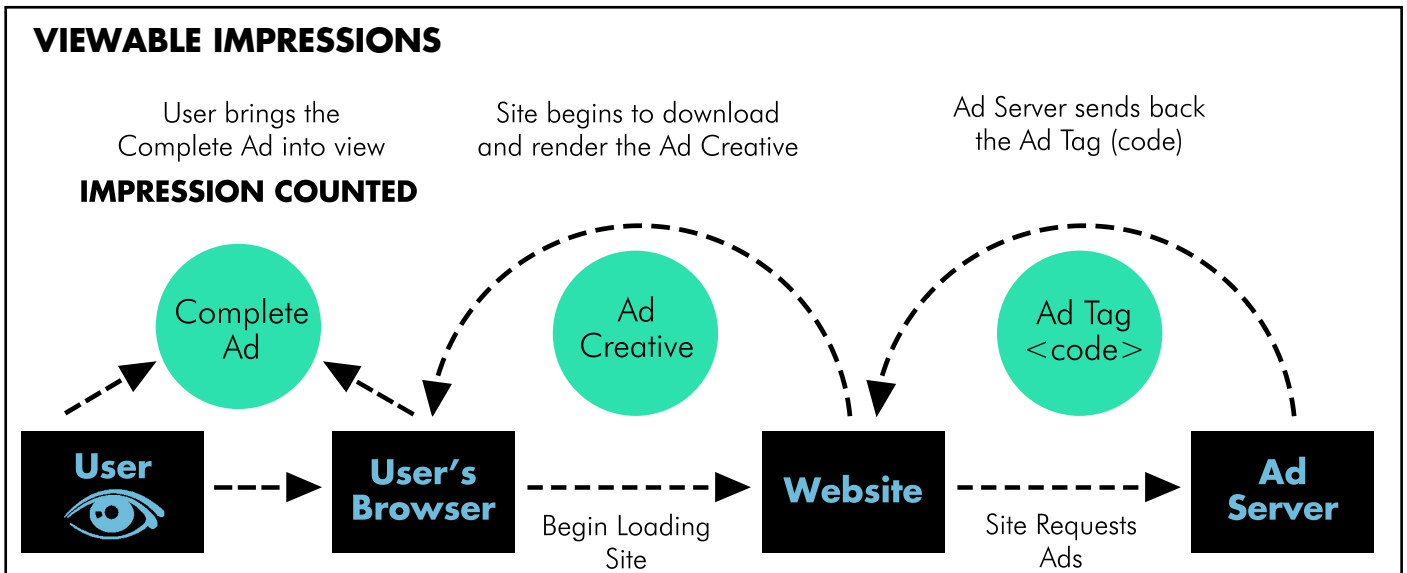
**STANDARD IMPRESSIONS**



**BEGIN-TO-RENDER IMPRESSIONS**



**VIEWABLE IMPRESSIONS**



# BEGIN-TO-RENDER MARKET PERSPECTIVE

## PUBLISHER PERSPECTIVE

As there is an increase and focus for continuous improvement of digital ad measurement, 'Begin-to-Render' is gradually making its way to align mobile and desktop guidelines with the start-to-render standard of video ads. Since longer ad exposure leads to better results for brands, publishers recognise the importance of moving away from the concept of a served impression, as it has no real connection to whether an ad was in view or for how long.

There are challenges, including the many ad-servers that require tweaks to support this major counting mechanism transition. For example, the start-to-render measurement adds at least a few milliseconds to when an ad is counted, for example: higher rates of reporting discrepancies on reporting platforms; latency of ad loading can vary by device, and composition of the website may load faster or slower than others and change the way of accurate measurement across all publishers.

## AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

Major agency groups are working closely with viewability vendors including Moat, Sizmek, Integral Ad Science and ComScore.

As of early 2017, the Australian digital market is strategically focused on adopting viewability standards and not fully embracing the conversation for Begin-To-Render.

## IAB AUSTRALIA PERSPECTIVE

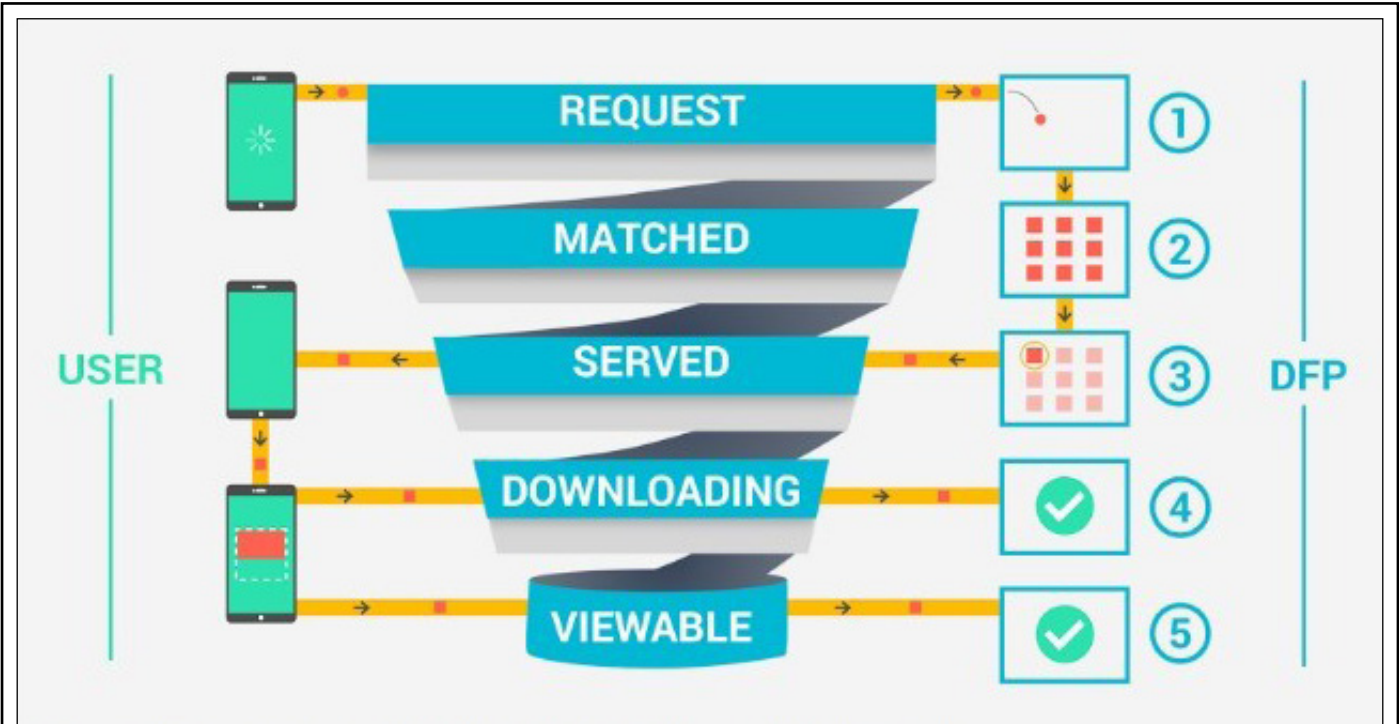
The IAB Standards & Guidelines Council supports any proposed improvements in loading and more accurate digital ad measurement. This includes:

- Emphasising key considerations of Begin-to-Render ties in with continuously evolving digital ad measurement and thinking beyond viewability
- Guiding publishers and work with agencies closely on changes required in ad servers - develop acceptable render time
- Recognising the importance of Begin-to-Render for advertisers and in future, publishers to address higher rate offerings
- Consideration of billing terms and conditions.

## VENDORS PERSPECTIVE

### DFP

In 2017, DoubleClick is transitioning to the measurement of downloaded impressions on both their buy- and sell-side technologies with the goal to align with industry standards. Phase one of three includes rendered impression metrics in reporting.



1. A publisher sends a request to DoubleClick for Publishers (DFP) for an ad.
2. DFP assembles a list of line items that match the request's targeting.
3. DFP selects the best ad to serve and sends the creative back to the publisher.
4. The publisher begins to render the creative code, downloading images or assets.
5. The user views the ad, meeting the creatives viewability standard.

DFP currently counts most impressions at step 3, but after the 2017 changes, will count all impressions at step 4.

A full summary and timeline of changes are available here: [https://support.google.com/dfp\\_premium/answer/7308129?hl=en](https://support.google.com/dfp_premium/answer/7308129?hl=en)

### Flashtalking

As of September 2016 Flashtalking has not switched their counting methodologies. However, they are offering a rendered metric as an option in their reporting tool.

### Sizmek

Sizmek has been following the IAB's guidelines for mobile impression counting (downloaded impressions) since 2014.

### AppNexus

AppNexus fire their tracker (AppNexus imp tracker) at the same time they start to render the creative. As such, their AST tag is already compliant with the IAB proposed updates.

# KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND ISSUES

## **DECREASE IN PUBLISHER INVENTORY**

Probably the most significant concern from the publisher perspective is that with the switch to a Begin-to-Render counting methodology will come a decrease in billable impression supply. The decrease has been estimated at between 10% and 20%, in some cases it will be more. Mobile inventory will be particularly vulnerable to the change. As such publishers most likely will need to increase rates to accommodate the shortfall.

## **IMPROVED VIEWABLE IMPRESSION PERCENTAGES**

Using begin to render impressions as opposed to served impressions to calculate viewability will, for most publishers, result in higher viewability rates. Some would argue that this is a more accurate representation of viewability as it excludes those ads that did not start to download for reasons of latency.

## **PUBLISHERS WILL NEED TO BE STRICTER ON AD SPECS AND LEAD TIMES**

As impression delivery will be entirely dependent on the time it takes for an ad to load, publishers will need to develop clear creative guidelines and strictly enforce them. Most importantly, enforcing LEAN principles, which will be covered in greater detail below. In addition to this, publishers' ad ops teams will require more time to test creatives for rendering time and allow for creatives to be sent back to agencies if specs have not been met - thus, they will need to enforce or possibly increase standard lead times. This may be the end of publishers accepting last-minute creative or accepting over-spec creative for the sake of the client.

## **POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVED CTRS, CONVERSION RATES AND INTERACTION RATES**

Like the theory behind improved viewability rates, counting impressions on Begin-to-Render has the potential to deliver improved and more accurate rates of campaign performance.

## **DECREASE IN REPORTING DISCREPANCIES**

Discrepancies in reporting will probably always exist; it would be naïve to think otherwise. Although, if all technology vendors use a Begin-to-Render methodology or at least offer it as an option, the industry may see discrepancies decrease. However, during the period of change over when some vendors offer the metric and others do not, discrepancies are expected to increase.

## **'FAIRER' FOR ADVERTISERS**

In theory the Begin-to-Render counting method is fairer to advertisers than served impressions. Advertisers will be billed on the number of times an ad will potentially be seen not just requested. Advertisers will not be penalised for slow loading or poorly designed sites. However, Begin-to-Render will not be fairer for publishers if specs and guidelines are not met.

## **AD BLOCKERS**

A publisher's downloaded impressions can be affected by ad blockers, if not integrated with guidelines. We know, through recent years, ad blockers are used to block third-party calls and not count the initial ad beacon, and this triggers and blocks the counting.





# LEAN PRINCIPLES AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT FOR 'BEGIN-TO-RENDER'

The IAB's LEAN Principles call for ads to be Light, Encrypted, Ad Choice-supporting, and Non-invasive. The overall effect is to provide a better advertising experience for the end user, which in turn will provide greater commercial effectiveness of the ads themselves – a mutually beneficial cycle.

Regarding how these principles relate to the Begin-to-Render impression counting method, the two most critical aspects of LEAN for this is that ads should be Light and Encrypted. Put simply: Ads that are lighter will load quicker, the quicker they load, the more likely they will be counted as an impression if using the Begin-to-Render method. This is because the Begin-to-Render method counts the impression as soon as the ad begins to render – the lighter the ad, the quicker the site can pass this to the browser and begin the download. The most likely scenario for users here is that heavier ads will take a longer time to download (render) and before it does, the user navigates away from the current page.

Encryption comes into the discussion because the internet is moving towards broad adoption of HTTPS. This means that for an ad to be compliant with the LEAN Principles, all resources delivered to an HTTPS parent frame must be similarly delivered over HTTPS. The major browsers (Chrome, Firefox, IE and Safari) all now block mixed content

by default rather than display an error message. As such, if an ad is not entirely delivered via HTTPS, there is a good chance that the browser will automatically block the ad by default, having detected aspects that do not pass the audit. If the ad never loads it will obviously never be counted as an impression. But even more likely, the same scenario will occur as above wherein the ad load is delayed by the detection of HTTP resources, during which time the user navigates away from the page before the ad can begin to render (and be counted as an impression).

	<b>LIGHT</b> <hr/> Limited file size with strict data-call guidelines
	<b>ENCRYPTED</b> <hr/> Assure user security with https/SSL compliant ads
	<b>AD CHOICE SUPPORTED</b> <hr/> All ads should support consumer privacy programs
	<b>NON-INVASIVE ADS</b> <hr/> Ads that supplement the user experience and don't disrupt it



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q:** How do I know what impression counting method my ad server uses?

**A:** It's been released that Google's DoubleClick for Publishers (DFP) has begun adoption of the Begin-to-Render method with a plan to full transition over the coming months. For other ad servers, it is best to contact their support teams directly for confirmation.

**Q:** How would changing to Begin-to-Render effect our inventory?

**A:** Moving from "Standard" to "Begin-to-Render" methods would most certainly have some impact; and this would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis because every network is different. There is a high chance that your ad server already uses Begin-to-Render in which case no action or concern is needed. But if this move is required, you could expect to see overall less impressions counted because Begin-to-Render counts the impression later in the life cycle than "Standard" and hence is more subject to uncontrollable variables such as a user's internet bandwidth, device speed, browser etc. It is important to remember that these are industrywide changes, so you should expect to see these fluctuations decrease as Begin-to-Render becomes the universal standard, and more ads are created to abide by the IAB's LEAN principles.

**Q:** How does Begin-to-Render affect Viewable Impression tracking?

**A:** It doesn't. Begin-to-Render means an impression is counted once the ad starts to download or "render" via the user's browser. Once this ad is rendered completely and is in the user's active viewport, then it comes eligible to be counted as a Viewable Impression. If anything, adoption of LEAN principles to better improve how many impressions get counted via the Begin-to-Render method will have a positive knock-on effect for viewability – the quicker an ad loads and the less intrusive it is, the more likely that users will see it.

**Q:** What measures can I take to improve impressions Begin-to-Render impressions on my site?

**A:**

1. Educate your advertisers, make sure they insist on LEAN principles with their creative teams.
2. Review your ad specs, adjust where necessary and enforce them.
3. Include a maximum render time limit in your specs and enforce it.
4. Reach out to your ad-server to suggest ways in which to speed up ad calls.
5. Look at ad targeting, can it be simplified? The more granular the targeting, the more time the ad server will need to find and begin to render the ad.
6. Consider revising rate cards and billing terms and conditions.

**Q:** How can I measure a creative's render time?

**A:** There is currently no industry standard method of measuring a creative's time to begin to render. There are a few ways to measure completed render. If you are a publisher using DFP, and the creative is live, there is a "render time" metric in the Google console. Alternatively you can use the IAB's ad validator - <https://html5.iabtechlab.com> and look at the time that appears in the "Ad Snapshots".

## APPENDICES

Information has been sourced from the following articles:

- <https://www.iab.com/?s=render>
- <https://www.admonsters.com/blog/begin-to-render-impression-counting>
- <https://www.admonsters.com/blog/opspov-preparing-rendered-impression-revolution-updated>
- [https://support.google.com/dfp\\_premium/answer/7308129?hl=en](https://support.google.com/dfp_premium/answer/7308129?hl=en)
- <https://support.google.com/dcm/answer/7246176?hl=en>