



## **Viewability Implementation: Background and Checklist of Key Considerations**

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As advertisers, agencies and publishers move to transition from a digital advertising currency based on served impressions to one based on viewable impressions, we have prepared this summary of considerations for implementation of viewable impression measurement. It is important for practitioners to have reasonable expectations in moving forward with viewable impressions as well as to consider several implementation parameters where digital advertising buyers and sellers should reach a common understanding.

Ideally these considerations should be made prior to entering into agreements that involve viewable impression measurement.

### **I. The Realities of Viewable Impressions and Viewable Impression Measurement**

Many believe that digital is the most measurable medium, and certainly we are aware that digital advertising practitioners have developed high expectations of measurement precision. Viewable impressions represent a strong step forward, providing assurance that consumers have the opportunity to see digital advertising messages.

The reality is, however, that it is unreasonable for advertisers, agencies and publishers implementing viewable impressions as measurement currency to expect to observe viewable rates of 100% in analyses of their campaigns.

There are unavoidable reasons why this reality exists – for example, served impressions are not 100% viewable because users do not linger on advertisements for the required amount of time; users are exposed to an insufficient portion of the advertisement; or users can encounter advertisements in out-of-focus situations or when the ad is obstructed based on browser tabs they have set. All of these examples, as well as others, can contribute to reducing viewable rates.

*[Although outside the boundaries of the Viewable Impression Guidelines, we should also note that reaching targeted consumers with viewable advertising is also likely to be less than 100% effective. Adding in demographic targeting to viewable impression measurement introduces additional complexity, as well as additional variables to be considered, that may result in unrealized expectations for the campaign. Example causes can include inaccurate or outdated demographic data associated with the impressions, some of which can originate with consumers themselves (i.e., in registration data); use of ascribed or attributed demographic information; missing data; and consumers sharing or co-using devices. No vendors have been accredited for viewable impressions within demographic category to date, and MRC advises practitioners who do choose to use the combination of these data at the current time to do so with extreme caution.]*

As viewable impression measurement continues to evolve, MRC is working with MRC-accredited viewability measurers to refine approaches to ensure greater consistency across results. In addition to requiring vendor implementation of MRC's viewable impression reconciliation guidance, which identified specific areas of viewable impression measurement processes that could lead to discrepancies in results (see *MRC Industry Communication* issued March 31, 2014 for details), MRC, in its ongoing accreditation activities, is seeking to improve the overall state of viewable impression measurement by encouraging vendors to adopt best practices aimed at achieving higher measured rates, and therefore also helping to promote high levels of consistency in viewability measurements across accredited vendors.

We believe practitioners should adopt a reasonable expectation of viewable impression results, especially for initial campaigns, and that gradually these expectations can be adjusted more aggressively as experience and stewarding techniques develop.

## II. Implementation Processes and Parameters for Consideration: Summary

This Summary is followed by a detailed explanation of each area considered.

1. Agreement on Use of a Viewability Measurer
2. Importance of Measured Rates
3. Viewable Rate vs. Viewable Impression Counts; Non-Measured Impressions
4. Considering Projection of Non-Measured Impressions
5. Accounting for Mobile Ad Impressions
6. Measuring the Ad vs. Measuring the Ad Container
7. The Use of User Interaction Proxies
8. Treatment of Large Size Ad Units
9. Effects of Enhanced Filtration Processes on Measurements

## III. Implementation Processes and Parameters for Consideration: Details

*(We have added MRC suggestions for certain items below, based on our experience. These should not be interpreted as requirements.)*

1. Parties should agree to a common provider for the viewability measurements for the campaign.
  - a. MRC encourages all to use MRC-accredited measurers for this role.
  - b. Both buyer and seller would be well advised to have independently tested the measurement provider prior to using it for live campaign measurement to ensure its methods are compatible with existing systems, and to establish general baselines for what is to be expected of the resulting measurements in production environments.
  - c. Timely monitoring, in the initial hours or days of campaign execution, should be jointly conducted. This ensures minimization of human error by all parties in campaign set-up, tagging and reporting. MRC encourages full transparency concerning the sharing of campaign results, and active communication among all parties throughout the process.
  - d. If the publisher(s) or ad-networks associated with campaign placement use internal publisher-based viewability measurement tools (or vendors), the handling of discrepancies between the agency/advertiser tool and these sell-side tool(s) should be stated up-front in the Terms & Conditions of the campaign. Responsibilities for reconciliation and disposition of counting differences should be stated.

*MRC Suggestion: Buyer and seller agreement on a single measurement vendor for viewable counts and reporting can increase the efficiency of the process in general. Buyer and seller should also agree in advance on the ground rules to be followed around information sharing of the viewability measurement results; i.e., the level of transparency with which the results of the viewable impression measurements will be shared among all parties to the transaction, and the specifics for how this will occur both during and subsequent to the campaign.*

2. How much of the campaign can the viewability measurer measure? What are the “Measured Rates” (i.e., the percentage of served impressions for which a viewable or non-viewable decision can be made) for comparable types of campaigns?
  - a. Insist on disclosure by the measurer of all material limitations to its ability to measure viewability (such disclosure is required by MRC).

*MRC Suggestion: The Measured Rate is critical. Select a viewable impression vendor with higher Measured Rates (although realize that averages may not hold true for all campaigns). Campaigns designed with less stewarding such as ad network buys or blind buys may have lower Measured Rates, depending on the vendor's capabilities.*

3. Will the buy be based on a viewable impression rate for the campaign, or a straight count of viewable impressions? In either event, how do non-measured impressions affect the campaign results?
  - a. Non-measured impressions should not be assumed to be non-viewable impressions.

*MRC Suggestion: Initially we believe practitioners should concentrate on fulfilling base viewable impression counts. However, at the same time, we also believe non-measured impressions should not be counted as non-viewable. This speaks directly to the importance of seeking a high Measured Rate for the viewability measurement of the campaign. Finally, it is also important to note that processes for viewable optimization on the part of media organizations should be given time to unfold, as stewarding processes between buyer and seller are developed over time*

4. For those served impressions it cannot measure for viewability, does the measurer project viewability results from those impressions it can measure? If it does apply such projected or modeled data for non-measured impressions, what are the details behind its methods for doing so? And what is the empirical support that underlies these methods?

*MRC Suggestion: Only allow projection of viewable results to non-measured impressions when the vendor's projection methods have been subjected to audit (and preferably accredited by MRC). Prior to that rely on viewable counts only thereby minimizing the reliance on measured or viewable rate metrics. If the practitioner is compelled to use projections prior to audit/accreditation of the vendor, the practitioner should have a detailed understanding of the quality of the projection method.*

5. How does the measurer account for viewability when the ad is delivered to a mobile environment? Are such impressions considered non-measured? Are they measured using the same thresholds specified by the *MRC Viewable Impression Measurement Guidelines*, which are designed for desktop environments (i.e., a minimum of 50 percent of pixels for at least one continuous second for display, and two continuous seconds for video)? Are all impressions delivered to mobile in-application environments automatically counted as viewable, as is currently allowable under the *MRC Viewability Guidelines*?
  - a. MRC plans to enhance its viewability guidelines to more fully address mobile environments by early 2015.

*MRC Suggestion: Practitioners should focus on having a documented understanding of how mobile traffic will be measured for viewability purposes.*

6. Does the measurer base its viewability measurements off viewability of the ad itself, or is it based off viewability of the ad container (i.e., the IFrame in which the ad appears)?
  - a. If viewability is based on the ad container rather than the ad itself, what evidence does the measurer have that there is not a material difference in its counts versus those based on the ad itself?

*MRC Suggestion: Viewable measures based on the ad itself are preferred. However, regardless of the technique chosen (because both are legitimate approaches), at minimum the buyer and seller should agree on one vendor technique – either ad or container. Be cautious when using more than one measurement vendor if they employ different orientations – counts*

*from a vendor that measures the ad may differ from counts of a vendor that uses container-based measurement, even on the same campaign activity.*

7. Does the measurer consider certain user interactions as proxies for viewability in its measurements? If so, are what are these qualifying interactions, and are they among those that are allowable under the MRC Viewability Guidelines?

*MRC Suggestion: If user interactions serve as proxies for viewable impressions, ask for these to be segregated and quantified in any campaign where they are applied.*

8. Does the measurer use a different pixel threshold to determine viewability for certain large size ads (specifically, those ad units that are greater than 242,500 pixels)?
  - a. This is allowable under the MRC Viewability Guidelines, but must be disclosed.

*MRC Suggestion: If the campaign creative includes these large size ads, it is highly critical that the viewable measurement vendor uses the more liberal pixel threshold for these ads. Without these lower thresholds, large size ads are less likely to be counted as viewable merely because of the size of the ad.*

9. Does the measurer apply additional enhanced filtration processes beyond those that are required for served impression counts, or perform certain ad verification functions (for example, does it exclude impressions for out of target geography from its counts)? If so, are these processes applied before or after the viewable impression count?
  - a. Such processes should be applied after the initial viewable impression count, per the MRC Viewability Guidelines. In such situations, it may be wise to ask to see the viewable impression counts with and without these processes applied.

*MRC Suggestion: In these situations, ask for viewable counts to be reported with and without these processes applied.*

Finally, MRC refers participants in the digital advertising buy/sell process to the *IAB Ad Campaign Measurement Process Guidelines* (published July 2008) for general guidance on industry-accepted control objectives that are recommended for the processes associated with the execution of digital advertising campaigns.