



MRC Issues Final Digital Advertising Auction Transparency Standards

New York, NY (January 29, 2026): The Media Rating Council (MRC) today issued a final document outlining requirements, guidance, and best practices for Digital Advertising Auction Transparency.

This document represents MRC's effort to set standards for transparency, disclosure and reporting of various aspects and results for digital advertising auctions (including but not limited to display, text, video and audio formats within digital, search, social, retail media, streaming CTV and addressable TV channels) - as part of its ongoing effort to develop standards for media measurement.

When implemented in a fair and transparent way, ad auctions have the unique ability to maximize value for advertisers, media sellers, and consumers alike:

- Consumers: serving them an ad with the greatest relevance from the most interested advertiser
- Advertisers: serving their ad at a fair price to the consumer most likely to be interested in their product or service, real-time price discovery
- Sellers: clearing 100% of their available inventory at a fair price, real-time price discovery

Despite the growth and diversity of ad auctions in media, there were previously no standards for "Ad Auctioneer conduct regarding disclosure and reporting of auction rules or transparency into auction processes and outcomes," said Ron Pinelli, SVP of Digital Research and Standards for MRC. "It is the objective of these Standards to promote transparency around auction rules and scoring along with reporting and standardization where possible and appropriate, to ensure that auction rules and outcomes are understood for all parties."

The Standards include requirements and guidelines related to disclosures and reporting in the following areas:

- Type(s) of auction system(s) used.
- How winners of auctions are determined.
- After the winners of an auction have been determined, how prices that winners must pay are set.
- Use of reserve prices and methods to update them over time.
- Use of advance information about bids and budgets to adjust the functioning of the auction process and how this is updated over time.
- How often rules of the auction system are updated and disclosed to users?
- What information is disclosed or reported about the auction system and the outcome of auction?

The Standards originated from a project initiated by Omnicom Media and led by the MRC, with sponsorship from the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's), the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Tech Lab as well as Omnicom; and were developed with the participation of a large tripartite group of media content providers, advertising agencies, advertisers, vendors/consultants, ad auctioneers, measurement organizations and other interested organizations. The final document was subject to a 30-day public comment period in September 2025.

"Digital advertising runs on auctions, but buyers still can't typically see the rules of the game," said Ben Hovaness, Global Chief Media Officer for Omnicom Media agency OMD. "The MRC standards create a baseline for disclosure and reporting—how an auction scores, sets prices, uses reserves, and changes over time—so advertisers can validate outcomes, improve their bid strategies, and reduce waste that never reaches working media."

This effort is not aimed at any one platform, ad auctioneer, or auction type; nor is the intention to replace or alter existing industry protocols such as OpenRTB to communicate auction information, but to supplement them with guidance regarding methods disclosures and outcome reporting. MRC does not intend to stipulate or standardize the design of any auction type, as auctioneer companies can and should design auction systems to best suit the particular characteristics of a given media form.

Summarizing the desired outcome, Pinelli said, "The goal is to define the requisites for transparency and to provide guidance to auctioneers in explaining to advertisers how their auctions determine pricing and allocation and providing accountability through reporting."

With this final release, these Standards are available to be adopted by digital auctioneers and applied as part of voluntary MRC accreditation audits.

The document is available here:

https://www.mediaratingcouncil.org/sites/default/files/Standards/MRC_Digital_Advertising_Auction_Transparency_Standards_FINAL.pdf

Questions on this document can be submitted via email to MRC at:

rpinelli@mediaratingcouncil.org.

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About MRC

The Media Rating Council is a non-profit industry association established in 1963 comprised of leading television, radio, print and digital media companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and

trade associations, whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. Measurement services desiring MRC accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research as well as other applicable industry measurement guidelines; and submit to MRC-designed audits to authenticate and illuminate their procedures. In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the marketplace. Currently approximately 110 research products are audited by the MRC. Additional information about MRC can be found at www.mediaratingcouncil.org.

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