BLOG

The ugly sisters of digital media

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The twin issues of viewability and fraud are the ugly sisters of online advertising. If an ad can't be seen, it's worthless. If the viewer is a machine, it's criminal. Our view is simple; if an ad can't be seen, we won't pay.

After months of testing the MRC and IAB minimum threshold for display viewability has finally been unveiled. The video standard is awaited. GroupM and Xaxis have actively participated in the programs. Our conclusions are two-fold:

1. There are several technology vendors who cover a significant amount of available display inventory who have the technology deployed to meet this standard. We have negotiated preferred partnerships with them for our

clients' benefit.

2. A minimum threshold is just that, and certain creative assets require a higher standard. We won't deal on a minimum threshold where the minimum is not good enough to represent a true opportunity to see. The minimum requires 50% of pixels to be in view. We believe that almost without exception 100% is the requirement. To that end we will negotiate terms with vendors that reflect this view.

In respect of video, the proposed two second standard is not adequate in our opinion and we don't believe advertisers will find it adequate either. It falls well below the standards of TV where the concept of viewability is dealt with through the mechanism of commercial ratings which discount channel hopping and fast forwarding of time shifted viewing. Creative quality and engagement notwithstanding, there are few ads made that could pass the two second comprehension test.

Fraud is a related matter but is not subject to opinion. We believe that the responsibility for the quantification and eventual eradication of fraud is that of the seller and our negotiations will favor those that can demonstrate the integrity of their inventory. We will strenuously vet all vendors in this area to ensure compliance and, failing that, compensation for fraudulent views.

We use a combination of white lists, audience verification partners and ad server reconciliation to minimize fraud; and while the cheats always stay half a step ahead of the chasers, we will do everything we can to achieve the single most important right of the advertiser -- to get exactly what's paid for.

Fraud represents a systemic threat to all stakeholders in the success of digital marketing. If it is to fulfill its obvious promise of accountability it must create a market in impressions that are truly viewable by audiences that can be verified. Nothing else will do.

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