
Is our interest with viewability damaging the human experience?

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BY ED TROTTER, DIGITAL PLANNER 11 OCT 2016

Early this year, GroupM in the US set in place a trading standard of 100% viewability on all display and video ads, with a refusal to pay for inventory delivered below this threshold. In the UK, the standard has recently suggested as being set at a similarly high - if slightly more conservative - standard of 75% viewability.

Naturally, it's appealing for advertisers to see more stringent viewability standards being enforced by their respective agency. Media agencies have led clients towards a measureable, accountable approach to marketing, and in doing so have brought about a culture where efficiency is to be prized and wastage is to be avoided at all costs. This cultural shift has clear benefits; it highlights and champions strategies, partners and tactics

that quantifiably deliver business results, and ensures we build relationships with high performers.

However, we should also understand that viewability might demonstrate the limitations of such a philosophy. When we reduce a human experience to a quantifiable metric, we risk becoming detached from the nuance of how people interact with our ads.

The tactics that publishers employ to deliver this 75% viewability standard could run the risk of infuriating the very people to whom we're trying to communicate to. In the interest of protecting their ad revenue, publishers may look towards more intrusive, less user-friendly formats such as interstitials and sticky banners as a way to make sure that the ad gets seen, whether the user likes it or not. In a lot of ways, it's peculiar that we should hold digital to such a high standard. In almost every other medium, individuals have the right to look away from and ignore ads that they don't want to see, so why should digital formats be any different?

Instead, it may be more helpful to apply a consistent standard of 'opportunity to see', which can be applied without bias across all media. This would mean that the agency's responsibility is to give each ad a fair chance at being seen, rather than guaranteeing it in all cases. MediaCom won an award last year for our work in this area for Sky ensuring that the ultimate measure of success is the outcomes driven from that media, delivered at an effective cost.

This move towards a 75% viewability standard is a decision designed to protect advertisers' investment and deliver the best business results possible. It also demonstrates the need for us to be mindful of what is best for the advertiser and for the consumer, rather than focusing purely on media standards.

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