COLUMNS

Viewability is the new mobile metric

June 6, 2016

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For advertisers today, addressing mobile consumers in their marketing runs is practically non-negotiable. Smartphones are at the crux of most consumers' lives. Less than five years ago, only 35 percent of U.S. consumers owned smartphones. By spring 2015, that number had doubled.

Marketers responded accordingly, funneling their precious ad dollars into mobile campaigns. By 2019, mobile display ads will comprise about 40 percent of all display ads. Coupled with the fast rise of programmatic ad buying, they will represent approximately $15 billion in ad spend.

However, to fully optimize their mobile advertising campaigns, marketers must understand a key metric that is taking over: viewability.

Deeper dive into mobile viewability
Even the most precisely targeted ad will not yield a good ROI if the intended recipients do not see it.

As a result, viewability is at the vanguard of many businesses' decision on whether to place an ad on a certain channel or platform.

A 2015 survey conducted by Millennial Media found that the majority of businesses with budgets over $5 million intend to measure viewability against their mobile ad buys in the near future and hope to achieve at least 80 percent viewability.

The pressure to lean on viewability is mounting. Many brands have their sights set on 100 percent viewability. Here are a few things you need to understand about it:

1. Viewability should be different from desktop to mobile. Last year, industry watchdog Media Research Center released guidelines defining viewability. But there is a caveat: the guidelines are not mobile-specific. The MRC decided to apply desktop viewability guidelines to mobile.

It is important for marketers to understand this because user behavior on desktop and mobile devices is inherently different.

The mobile world is rife with quick scrolling and scaled-down sites for miniature screens factors that not only differ drastically from desktop, but that also influence an ad's viewability. This differentiation should impact the industry's measurement standards.

One independent analyst estimated that mobile device users start to scroll past content 13 seconds after loading begins compared to desktop users, who wait 24 seconds.

When scrolling begins sooner particularly before an ad finishes loading there is a greater chance that users will

When scrolling begins sooner particularly before an ad finishes loading there is a greater chance that users will scroll past the message entirely, rendering it unviewable.

The results are palpable: Analysts estimate that only 44 percent of mobile ads are viewable, while more than half of desktop ads could be adequately viewed.

Despite promises to release distinct mobile viewability guidelines by the end of first quarter, the updated information was not starkly different from what has been released in the desktop space.

After a year of promising mobile-specific guidelines, this first draft from the MRC decided to essentially measure both desktop and mobile almost identically.

As noted in the guidelines, a marketer will be charged once 50 percent of an ad has been viewed for one second or for two seconds in the case of a video ad.

2. Viewability is not fraud-proof. Just because an ad is "viewable" does not mean it is immune to bot fraud.

Imposters have caught on to the viewability craze and adapted their nefarious activity accordingly: controlling Web behavior to play to a provisional viewability metric.

It is working: A White Ops study found that fraud actually paraded a higher viewability score than real mobile users.

When it comes to viewability and ad fraud, ignorance is not bliss.

Luckily, you can diffuse the view fraud problem in the programmatic space simply by optimizing your campaigns to more concrete outcomes such as purchases, authorized account sign-ups and even number of email subscribers.

Yes, viewability is important, but when you rely solely on this metric, it can be difficult to accurately measure performance.

3. Ads may be more "viewable" in mobile applications. Eighty-seven percent of mobile consumption occurs within apps compared to a mere 13 percent on the mobile Web.

What is more, after Integral Ad Science reviewed more than 30 in-app impressions, it discovered that 81 percent of in-app ads were viewable. This is largely due to the app environment, which is, generally speaking, more quantifiable and viewable compared to the mobile Web.

With more people and better viewability, it could make sense to prioritize buying in-app inventory.

However, there are several important considerations when designing mobile app display ads, including how mobile users interact with the app and how your brand story fits seamlessly within it.

VIEWABILITY HAS climbed the rungs of digital marketing to solidify its place as a key metric to measure ad effectiveness.

However, it is not smart to hang your hat on this rather complicated metric without fully understanding the nuances that come along with it.

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