
IAB's Best Practices for Conducting Online Ad Effectiveness Research

Executive Summary

August 2011

Background

- **Builds on Dr. Lavrakas paper “*An Evaluation of Methods Used to Assess the Effectiveness of Advertising on the Internet*”**
- **Multiple interviews with key stakeholders**
 - Agencies, publishers and vendors

THE CHALLENGES

Planning	Recruitment	Deployment	Optimization
When to use an ad effectiveness survey	Declining response rates	Survey timing	Statistical differences between demographic groups
Optimal timing	Cookie deletion	Optimal survey length	Data Integrity
Lack of staff experience	Representativeness of samples		Role of digital in ad ecosystem
Cost of true experimental design			

PLANNING | *Challenge: When to Use Online Ad Effectiveness Surveys*

Advertisers should plan for a survey early in the campaign.

Best Practices:

● **Agencies and Advertisers**

- Use of studies should primarily be driven by campaign goals, such as increasing brand awareness or favorability
- Online ad effectiveness surveys «should only be used in conjunction with campaigns of a significant size.»
 - Optimally strive for 200 respondents
 - 100 responses for smaller sites for improved usability
- Publishers should guide agencies on minimum number of impressions necessary for statistically reliable research.

● **Publishers**

- Publishers should determine a minimum spending and impression threshold for running an online ad effectiveness study
 - 15 million impressions campaign should be the minimum
 - Rule of thumb: Cost of an effectiveness study should be **less than 10 percent** of the overall buy.

PLANNING | *Challenge: Communicating Research Plans in Advance*

Advertisers and Agencies give very little notice to run Ad Effectiveness studies, often less than 24 hrs before campaign launch.

- Agencies take research for granted: Agencies decide it's necessary to complement other campaign metrics to justify the ad spend
- Ongoing agency/publisher mistrust: Fear that informing a publisher will result in site allocating its premium inventory to that marketer

Agencies

- Include research in planning stages
- Ask pub permission
- RFP:
 - ID vendor(s)
 - ID pub responsibilities
- IO:
 - Recruitment impressions
- 4 weeks for tagging and implementation
- Remind pubs 14 days in advance
- Allow pub review & approval

Publishers

- Ask agencies to identify their chosen research vendor
- Note in IO if extra impressions are needed for the survey
- Share vendor contact information
- Require pre-approval for advertiser surveys to prevent any editorial/brand conflicts
- Provide advertisers, agencies and vendors with guidelines
- Provide list of preferred or approved vendors

Vendors

- Vendors should also proactively reach out to publishers to help publishers prepare for an upcoming study.

PLANNING | *Challenge: Agencies and Publishers Lack Research Experience & Education*

Many receive training on media math, negotiation tactics and agency or site processes, but are often less knowledgeable about research methodology and implementation.

Best Practices:

- **Agencies should train on basics of research methodologies and implementation.**
- **Training should include:**
 - How research objectives are married to campaign objectives
 - Limits of certain methodologies
 - How to best use data
 - Orientation to in-house experts for guidance

PLANNING | *Challenge: True Experimental Design is Both Costly and Operationally Inefficient*

Cost and complexity prevent true experimental design

- True experimental design is typically more expensive than today's studies
- Expect tech challenges:
 - Third-party ad servers are not built for ad effectiveness studies
 - 5 - 10% of media inventory should be allocated to the control group
 - 8 - 15 additional hours of work is necessary to train staff and set up the campaign.

Best Practices:

- Sub-par research methodology accepted in exchange for lower cost and greater efficiency
- The industry made concessions over a decade ago but now should strive to develop better, more efficient methodologies.
- The standard for what is deemed «good enough» needs to evolve and rise rapidly
 - Possible Solution: Ability to merge third party ad server data with consumer profiles through the ad exchanges and demand-side platforms
- Ad hoc work-arounds underscore the need for industry commitment to find better solutions

RECRUITMENT | *Challenge: Response Rates to Intercept Invitations are Declining*

The increase in studies has created clutter and had the adverse effect of lowered response rates.

Agencies

- Adding incentives not recommended except in rare cases (e.g. C-level execs)
- Use panels to recruit respondents to allay concerns about test and control samples (with caveats)
- Weight results to actual campaign delivery and demos
- Look into what effect, if any, survey timing has on results in order to model timing effects

Publishers

- Ask agencies to identify their chosen research vendor
- Aim to reduce clutter
- Deliver exit reports to agencies to summarize study activity
 - Ex: total number of completes, ad spend, cost of survey, impressions and reach/frequency

Vendors

- Conduct validation studies for panels

RECRUITMENT | *Challenge: Recruiting a Clean Control Group*

Recruiting a clean control group is increasingly difficult due to cookie deletion, emerging ad formats and a complex ad delivery value chain.

Best Practices:

- **Cookies becoming obsolete method to designate control group**
 - Test/control lifts can only be calculated if it can be guaranteed the control respondent has not been previously exposed
- **Vendors need to ensure recruitment rates are aligned with the media plan**
- **Further research needed to better understand scientific sampling as an alternative**

RECRUITMENT | *Challenge: Respondents are Not Representative of Target Audiences*

"Survey takers are a slightly different demographic than non-survey takers."

Best Practices:

- **Need more independent, third-party validation**
- **Include demographic questions in survey to compare sample to target audience**
- **Weight results to actual campaign delivery**
- **Panels may be able to address some of these issues**
- **Control and exposed groups should be recruited from same sites and target audience**

DEPLOYMENT | *Challenge: Surveys Sometimes Take Place During Exposure*

Online ad effectiveness survey intercept invitation sometimes occurs while the measured ad is still visible on the screen.

Best Practices:

- **All surveys should be given in an environment where measured brand ad isn't visible**
- **Survey delivery should either cover the entire screen or develop technology that measures all of the ads on the page**

DEPLOYMENT | *Challenge: Excessively Long Surveys Can Lower Completion Rates*

Designing a survey requires a trade-off between number of questions and consumer willingness to respond.

Best Practices:

- **Sweet spot is five to seven minutes or 20-25 questions**
 - Four minutes or less is ideal length
 - Surveys aimed at business professionals should be less than 10 minutes
 - Consumer-targeted products may be able to use longer surveys though advertisers should be wary of exceeding seven minutes
- **Surveys should show progress through the questionnaire**
- **QA survey to ensure median response times**
- **Vendors should eliminate “straight line” responders**
- **Marketers should include a qualifying questions unrelated to weighting**
- **Limited value in single question surveys**

OPTIMIZATION | *Challenge: Demographics and Data Can Confound Results*

There are statistical differences between groups. Trends in certain demographic groups can skew survey results if the sample is over-represented (ex. men vs. women).

Best Practices:

- **Weight results to actual campaign delivery**

Marketers need greater faith in their data in order to optimize their campaigns.

Best Practices:

- **Marry survey data to salient online and offline metrics**
 - Visits to their site, time spent, branded or trademarked search behavior and offline sales
- **Invest in research that looks at how online advertising fits into overall marketing plan**
- **Publisher & vendors should provide post-mortem on methodology and normative comparisons**
- **Be wary of making optimization decisions on real time data**