
IAB

Checklist for Improving Online Ad Effectiveness Studies

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IAB

Agency And Publisher Checklist

Background

- Ad effectiveness studies are complicated, there are a lot of moving parts and simple errors can invalidate the results of a study
- Today, none of the ad impact vendors have been audited to an industry standard by the MRC
- Even the most entrenched vendors often fail to set-up studies correctly and consequent invalid results can lead to invalid decisions
- These guidelines and checklists will help you ask the right questions, choose the best vendors, ensure accurate set-up and reporting and receive high quality and actionable results
- These best practices have been developed to address current online ad impact studies; however, there is much room for improvement and the IAB will continue to explore new methods of sampling and analyzing data
- Note: This document does not examine issues such as non-response bias or panel recruitment but provides the tools to garner the best and most actionable results using the current set of vendors and methodologies

Checklist: Pre-Selection

- ✓ Campaign Size/Feasibility: Is the campaign large enough to get a measurable, statistically significant sample? Recruitment methods and response rates vary by site so thresholds will differ widely. Publishers typically have the most reliable data about their completion rates and should be relied on to provide impression thresholds. Studies should only be conducted for campaigns that meet that threshold.
- ✓ Publisher Approval: Ensure that the sites where you plan to run the study have approved it and are prepared to implement necessary tags and provide bonus impressions (if needed). Implementation requirements vary by site, in order to guarantee that a campaign can be measured, request approval at least 2 weeks prior to study launch (2 weeks prior to campaign launch for simultaneous control, 4 weeks prior to campaign launch for pre-control).
- ✓ Fit: Does the study fit the objective? Are the correct metrics being measured?

Checklist: Set Up

- ✓ Matched Control Sample: True experimental design (random recruitment of control/exposed from the same placements) is the gold standard. When this design is not possible, the control should run in the same areas as the campaign and should be targeted to the same audiences. Any remaining differences in sample composition should be adjusted during post-campaign weighting (weighting variables should be chosen in advance and proactively integrated into the survey). If, however, there aren't weighting mechanisms (e.g. one-question surveys), then the gold standard must be adhered to (control/exposed from same placements).
- ✓ Recruitment Plan Matched to Media Plan: Respondents should be recruited from placements/sites in proportion to their weight in the media plan and should be recruited evenly across the course of the campaign.
- ✓ Ad Bias Prevention: No other ads should be on the screen while the survey is taking place (particular concern for in-banner surveys).
- ✓ Consistent Set-Up Across Sites: Base survey design and exposure lag must be consistent between sites to ensure that results are apples to apples.

Checklist: Set Up

- ✓ Consistent Tagging: Swapping creative can be operationally challenging; if creative changes throughout the campaign, ensure that tags are implemented immediately and correctly.
- ✓ Representative Placement Measurement: The survey must be able to measure all aspects (all units) of the campaign; ensure that pre-rolls and units without in-banner surveys (e.g. 300X60) are still measured.
- ✓ Management of Time from Exposure to Survey: If respondents are surveyed directly after exposure, results should only be compared to other surveys with the same time lag.
- ✓ Survey Length Maximums: The survey should be kept as short as possible (20 questions or 10 minutes max, whichever is shorter) to keep responses rates up and minimize respondent fatigue; mobile studies should be 12 questions max.
- ✓ Demographic Match to Campaign: Site intercepts recruit a random sample of those exposed to a campaign directly from the site, the base pool of respondents in a panel must be set up to represent the composition of the site and the respondents who are recruited should be representative of those exposed to the campaign.

Checklist: Reporting

- ✓ Control/Exposed Weighting: The only differences between the control and exposed groups should be exposure to the campaign; therefore the groups should be matched on as many variables as possible, including: demos, category behavior and site visitation. In absence of experimental design, it is impossible to account for 100% of the variance between cells but best efforts should be made to match on known biasing variables. Some members of the Research Council still have concerns about weighting in absence of experimental design.
- ✓ Placement/Frequency Weighting: The exposed group should be representative of where and when the campaign ran, if recruitment wasn't even by site, placement or frequency, the results should be weighted.
- ✓ Sample Size: Opinion varies on thresholds but N=50 is the absolute minimum sample that should be stat tested or used to garner any valid takeaways from a campaign or a target analysis; a sample of N=50 per site and/or sub-group is needed to adequately weight results by site, demo or behavior as weighting relies on stable data for each component of the scheme.
- ✓ Statistical Significance: 90% or 95% are standard confidence levels for significance.