

# Rich Media Measurement Guidelines

Fall 2007, Version 1.0





## Introduction

These guidelines are meant to establish the minimum acceptable counting procedures for Rich Media based advertising impressions. The guidelines are focused on when a rich media ad impression will count - the actual revenue event. As with all measurement standards, publishers and Rich Media vendors may choose to offer additional enhancements to these guidelines for competitive differentiation, so long as they fully disclose these features while meeting the minimum accepted guidelines.

For the purposes of these guidelines, **Rich Media Advertising is defined as:** advertisements with which users can interact (as opposed to solely animation) in a web page format. These advertisements can be used either singularly or in combination with various technologies, including but not limited to sound, video, or Flash, and with programming languages such as Java, Javascript, and DHTML. These Guidelines cover standard Web applications including e-mail, static (e.g. html) and dynamic (e.g. asp) Web pages, and may appear in ad formats such as banners and buttons as well as transitionals and various over-the-page units such as floating ads, page take-overs, and tear-backs. Wireless media will be covered in separate guidelines.

In many ways, these guidelines are similar to guidelines already in place for general ad impressions and digital video commercials. The definitions included in this document are a continuation of the Measurement Certification Initiative led by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and facilitated by the Media Rating Council (MRC), and these guidelines are meant to be an addendum to the existing Ad Impression Measurement Guidelines published in 2004.

## Scope and Applicability

These guidelines are intended to cover on-line browser or browser-equivalent based Internet activity. Wireless, off-line cached media and Interactive-based television were not addressed in these guidelines due to differences in infrastructure and/or delivery method. Additionally, newer extended metrics that are just beginning to be captured by media companies, such as "flash tracking" or flash sites, are not addressed in this document and will be addressed at a later time.

## Project Participants

AOL	ImServices Group	Unicast Communications Corp.
Atlas Solutions	Kaboose.com	Univision Online
CNET Networks	Mediaplex	ValueClick Media
CondèNet	Microsoft Digital Advertising Solutions	VMIX
DoubleClick	Operative	Walt Disney Internet Group
Eyeblaster	PointRoll	Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive
Eyewonder	Reed Business	The Weather Channel Interactive
Google	Rentrak	Yahoo!



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## 1. Definitions

- Transitional Ads: Transitional Ads (a.k.a. “Interstitials”) have been consolidated within the rich media category and represent full- or partial-page text and image server-push advertisements which appear in the transition between two pages of content. Forms of transitionals can include splash screens and pop-up windows.
- Fourth-Party Ad Server: For a campaign, the entity other than the publisher or third-party ad server, who holds the rich media creative assets (or facilitates obtaining the creative asset through the ad media or creative server) and serves them into a web site.
- Rich Media Provider: For a campaign, the entity that serves the rich media advertising assets into the web site.
- Rich Media Vendor: An entity that produces rich media advertising formats or technologies.
- Third-Party Ad Server: For a campaign, the entity other than the publisher, who holds the rich media creative assets (or facilitates obtaining the creative asset through the ad media or creative server) and serves rich media advertising assets into a web site.

## 2. Acceptable Counting Methods for Rich Media Ad Impressions

Similar to general Internet ad impressions, an ad impression or Rich Media is defined as: A measurement of responses from a rich media ad delivery system to an ad request from the user’s browser, which is filtered from robotic activity and is recorded at a point as late as possible in the process of delivery of the creative material to the user’s browser – therefore closest to the actual opportunity to see by the user.

In the Rich Media area, where advertising creative is more process-resource intensive for Internet users, servers and publishers, the number of redirects in the transaction stream can impact the accuracy of ad counting due to latency. All parties are encouraged to consider this latency when considering the structure of Rich Media serving arrangements.

Client-initiated counting is required. Client initiated counting is based on activity (content or ad requests, formatting and redirects) originating at the Internet user’s browser and involves more than one Internet round-trip before counts can be recorded. The initial internet round-trips are generally to request and return general content and advertising content and subsequent round-trips can facilitate counting using calls, redirects, beacons, etc.

The following details are key components of the Rich Media Guidelines:

1. A valid ad impression may only be counted when an ad counter receives and responds to an HTTP request for a tracking asset from a user’s browser. For client-initiated ad serving, the ad content itself may be treated as the tracking asset and the ad server itself can do the ad counting. The count must happen after the initiation of retrieval of underlying non-advertising content (page, video, etc.). Permissible implementation techniques include (but are not limited to) HTTP requests generated by <IMG>, <IFRAME> or <SCRIPT SRC>.
2. The response by the ad counter includes but is not limited to:
  - Delivery of ad content, post caching.
    - Delivery of a “beacon,” which may be defined as any piece of content designated as a tracking asset. Beacons will commonly be in the form of a 1x1 pixel image, but this guideline does not apply any restrictions to the actual media-type or content-type employed by a beacon response.



- Delivery of a “302” redirect or html/javascript (which doubles as a tracking asset) to any location.
  - Expandable rich media ads should be counted using the aforementioned techniques using the base impression as the benchmark (and using a client side method). Further activity, such as expansion of the ad upon mouse-over, can be counted as part of other measured activity, but should be segregated from the original base-ad impression count.
3. Measurement of any ad delivery may be accomplished by measuring the delivery of a tracking asset associated with the ad.
    - Over-the-page ads and transitional ads should be tagged such that the rich media provider should count the ad only when it is played.
  4. The ad counter must employ standard headers on the response, in order to minimize the potential of caching.
  5. If a browser or operating system is not flash capable, the user has disabled flash functionality, or in other cases where the browser is incapable of loading the original intended creative due to its rich media contents, the rich media advertisements is not loadable. In these cases, the rich media provider should make non-flash default creative available for the serving process. These default creative impressions should be counted; however, for reporting purposes, they should be segregated from the rich media impressions.
    - Transitional or over-the-page ads do not require a default creative.
    - The party hosting and serving rich media assets should offer the opportunity for other organizations in the transaction stream to track rich media versus default ad activity. These parties are encouraged to track this information.

Certain rich media vendors allow the ability to insert ad delivery tracking information, from downstream publishers or ad-servers into their ad tags. This type of coordination, which facilitates consistency of counting procedures, is acceptable under these Guidelines.

### 3. Filtration Guidelines

Filtration of ad-serving transactions to remove non-human activity is highly critical to accurate, consistent counting. Filtration guidelines consist of two approaches: (1) filtration based on specific identification of suspected non-human activity, and (2) activity-based filtration (sometimes referred to as “pattern analysis”). Each organization should employ both techniques in combination. Organizations are encouraged to adopt the strongest possible filtration techniques.

#### Minimum Requirements

The following explains minimum filtration activity acceptable for compliance with this guideline:

##### A. Specific Identification Approach:

- Robot Instruction Files are used.
- URL, user agent, and client browser information is used to exclude robots based on exact matches with a combination of two sources: (1) The IAB/ABCe International Spider & Robot List (or some equivalent); and (2) a list of known Browser-Types (also included in the IAB/ABCe International Spider & Robot List). In the case of (1), matches are excluded from measurements. For item (2) matches are included in measurements. (Note that filtration occurring in third party activity audits is sufficient to meet this requirement.)
- Disclose company-internal traffic on a disaggregated basis. If company-internal traffic is material to reported metrics and does not represent exposure to ads or content that is qualitatively similar to non-internal users, remove this traffic. Additionally remove all robotic or non-human traffic arising from internal sources, for example IT personnel performing testing of web-pages. A universal or organizational identification string for



all internal generated traffic or testing activity is recommended to facilitate assessment, disclosure or removal of this activity as necessary.

### B. Activity-based Filtration:

- In addition to the specific identification technique described above, organizations are required to use some form of activity-based filtration to identify new robot-suspected activity. Activity-based filtration identifies likely robot/spider activity in log-file data through the use of one or more analytical techniques. Specifically, organizations can analyze log files for:
  1. Multiple sequential activities – a certain number of ads, clicks or pages over a specified time period from one user,
  2. Outlier activity – users with the highest levels of activity among all site visitors or with page/ad impressions roughly equal to the total pages on the site,
  3. Interaction attributes – consistent intervals between clicks or page/ad impressions from a user
  4. Other suspicious activity – users accessing the robot instruction file, not identifying themselves as robots. Each suspected robot/spider arising from this analysis requires follow-up to verify the assumption that its activity is non-human.

Rich media organizations should apply all of these types of techniques, unless in the judgment of the auditor and management (after running the techniques at least once to determine their impact), a specific technique is not necessary for materially accurate reporting. If a sub-set of these techniques are used, this should be re-challenged periodically to assure the appropriateness of the approach.

Activity Based filtration must be applied on a periodic basis, with a minimum frequency of once per quarter. Additionally Activity Based filtration should be run on an exception basis in order to check questionable activity. In all cases Organizations must have defined procedures surrounding the schedule and procedures for application of this filtering. The intent of activity-based filtration is to use analytics and judgment to identify likely non-human activity for deletion (filtration) while not discarding significant real visitor activity. Activity-based filtration is critical to provide an on-going “detective” internal control for identifying new types or sources of non-human activity. A rich media organization should periodically monitor its pattern analysis decision rule(s) to assure measurements are protected from robot/spider inflationary activity with a minimal amount of lost real visitor activity. Additionally, publishers and ad serving organizations should fully disclose the significant components of their filtration process to buyers and other users of their data.

### 4. Caching Guidelines

Cache busting is required for all sites and ad-serving organizations. Cache busting will be achieved by assigning random number to each request in order to identify unique serving occurrences of pages/ads and to setting immediate expatriation HTTP header in the ad server HTTP response.

The following techniques are acceptable:

- a. HTTP Header Controls for the expiration header.
- b. URL Parameters (GET/POST) for the random number assignment

Publishers and ad serving organizations should fully disclose their cache busting techniques to buyers and other users of their data.



## 5. Auditing Guidelines

Third-party independent auditing is encouraged for all ad-serving applications used in the buying and selling process. This auditing is recommended to include both counting methods and processing/controls as follows:

1. **Counting Methods:** Independent verification of activity for a defined period. Counting method procedures generally include a basic process review and risk analysis to understand the measurement methods, analytical review, transaction authentication, validation of filtration procedures and measurement recalculations. Activity audits can be executed at the campaign level, verifying the activity associated with a specific ad creative being delivered for performance measurement purposes.
2. **Processes/Controls:** Examination of the internal controls surrounding the ad delivery, recording and measurement process. Process auditing includes examination of the adequacy of site or ad-server applied filtration techniques.

Although audit reports can be issued as infrequently as once per year, some audit testing should extend to more than one period during the year to assure internal controls are maintained. Audit reports should clearly state the periods covered by the underlying audit testing and the period covered by the resulting certification.

### US Certification Recommendation

All ad-serving applications used in the buying and selling process are recommended to be certified as compliant with these guidelines at minimum annually. This recommendation is strongly supported by the AAAA and other members of the buying community, for consideration of measurements as “currency.”

## 6. Disclosure Guidance

The methods used for ad-counting must be disclosed during the sales process. Disclosure requirements mirror existing ad impression guidelines.

Any method used for triggering ad-counting (using any of the above methods) must be disclosed during the sales process. This disclosure should include specifics of any time-based metrics used in addition to the specific nature of agreed-upon user interactions or content demarcations. If different trigger methods are combined within campaign, results from different trigger approaches should be disaggregated for reporting purposes, insofar as possible.

Additionally, changes to counting triggers must be disclosed to all affected parties at time of change (if material and mid-campaign, advanced notification is warranted with estimated impact). Changes that occur during campaigns should be disaggregated before and after change for reporting purposes.

Similar to general ad-impression measurements, an organization’s methodology for accumulating Internet measurements should be fully described to users of the data. Specifically, the nature of Internet measurements, methods of sampling used (if applicable), data collection methods employed, data editing procedures or other types of data adjustment or projection, calculation explanations, reporting standards (if applicable), reliability of results (if applicable) and limitations of the data should be included in the disclosure.

The following are examples of the types of information disclosed:

- Nature of Internet Measurements
- Name of Property, Domain, Site, Included in the Measurement
- Name of Measurement Report
- Type of Measurements Reported
- Sampling Methods Used for Browsers not Accepting Cookies or Browsers with New Cookies
- Explanation of Projection Methods Data Collection Methods Employed



- Method of Data Collection
  - Logging Method
  - Logging Frequency
  - Logging Capture Point
  - Types of Data Collected
  - Contents of Log Files
  - Cookie Types
  - Contacts with Users (if applicable)
- Research on Accuracy of Basic Data
- Cookie Participation Percentages
- Latency Estimates
- Rate of Response (if applicable) Editing or Data Adjustment Procedures
- Checking Records for Completeness
  - Consistency Checks
  - Accuracy Checks
  - Rules for Handling Inconsistencies
  - Circumstances for Discarding Data
  - Handling of Partial Data Records
  - Ascription Procedures Computation of Reported Results
- Description of How Estimates are Calculated
  - Illustrations are desirable
- Weighting Techniques (if applicable)
- Verification or Quality Control Checks in Data Processing Operations
- Pre-Release Quality Controls
- Reprocessing or Error Correction Rules
- Reporting Standards (if applicable)
- Requirements for Inclusion in Reports, Based on Minimum Activity Levels Reliability of Results
- Sampling Error (if applicable) Limitations on Data Use
  - Non-sampling Error
- Errors or Unusual Conditions Noted in Reporting Period
- Limitations of Measurement, such as Caching, Multiple Users per Browser, Internet latency

## 7. Conclusion and Contact Information

This document represents the combined effort of the IAB and MRC to bring consistency and increased accuracy to Internet measurements. We encourage adoption of these guidelines by all organizations that measure Internet activity and/or wish to have their measurements included for consideration by buyers.

For further information or questions please contact the following individuals:

### **Interactive Advertising Bureau:**

IAB Ad Technology Team  
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7th floor  
New York, NY 10016

### **Media Rating Council:**

[staff@mediaratingcouncil.org](mailto:staff@mediaratingcouncil.org)

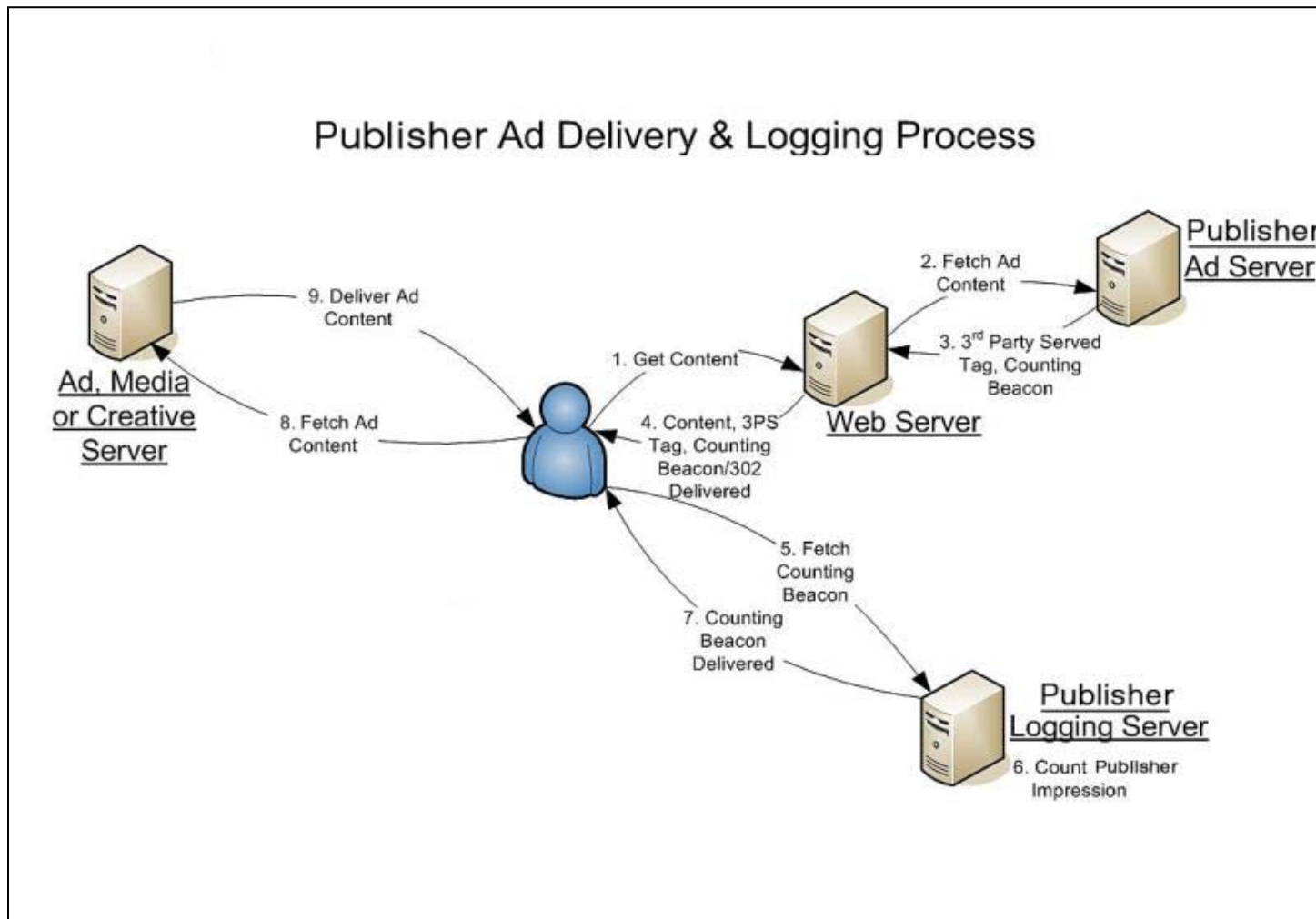
George Ivie, Executive Director  
370 Lexington Ave., Suite 902 New  
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[Givie@mindspring.com](mailto:Givie@mindspring.com)

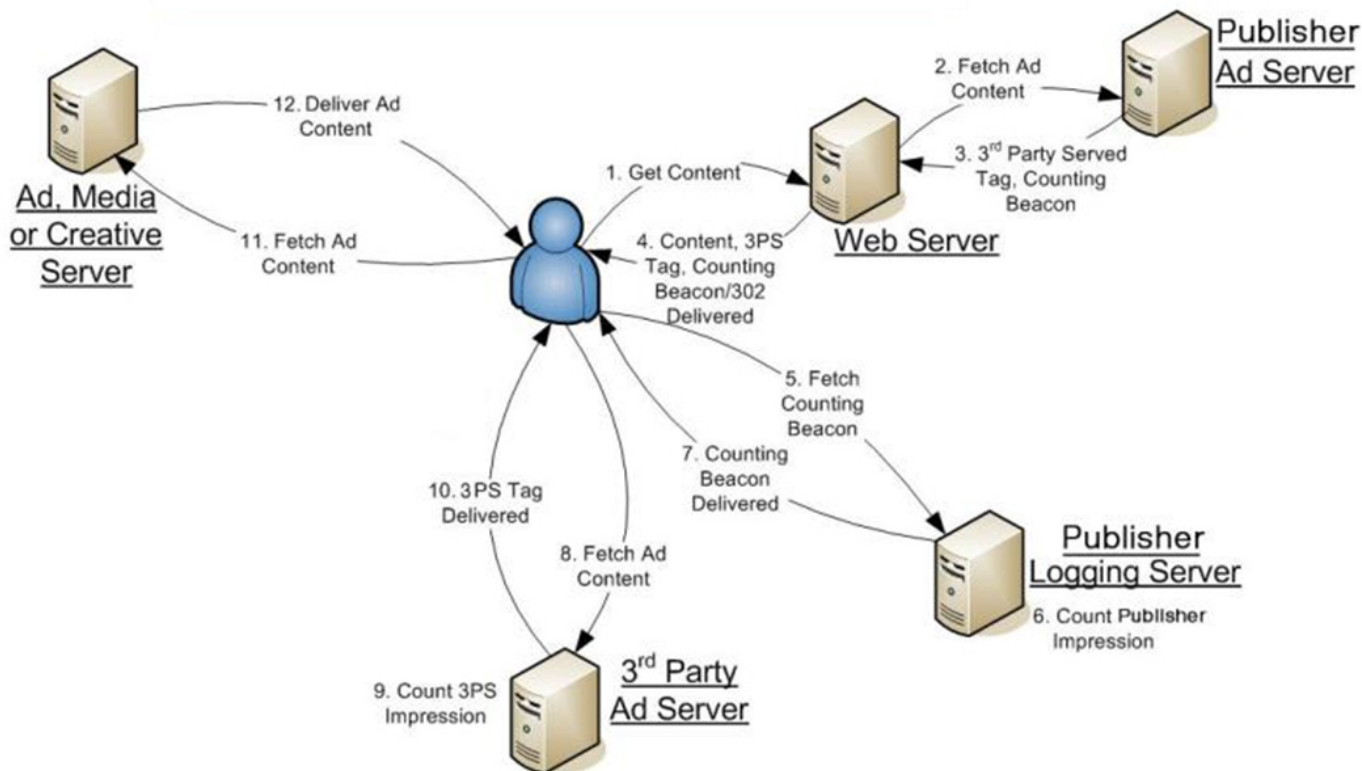
## Appendix A: Rich Media Ad Serving Schematics





### Publisher and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Ad Delivery & Logging Process

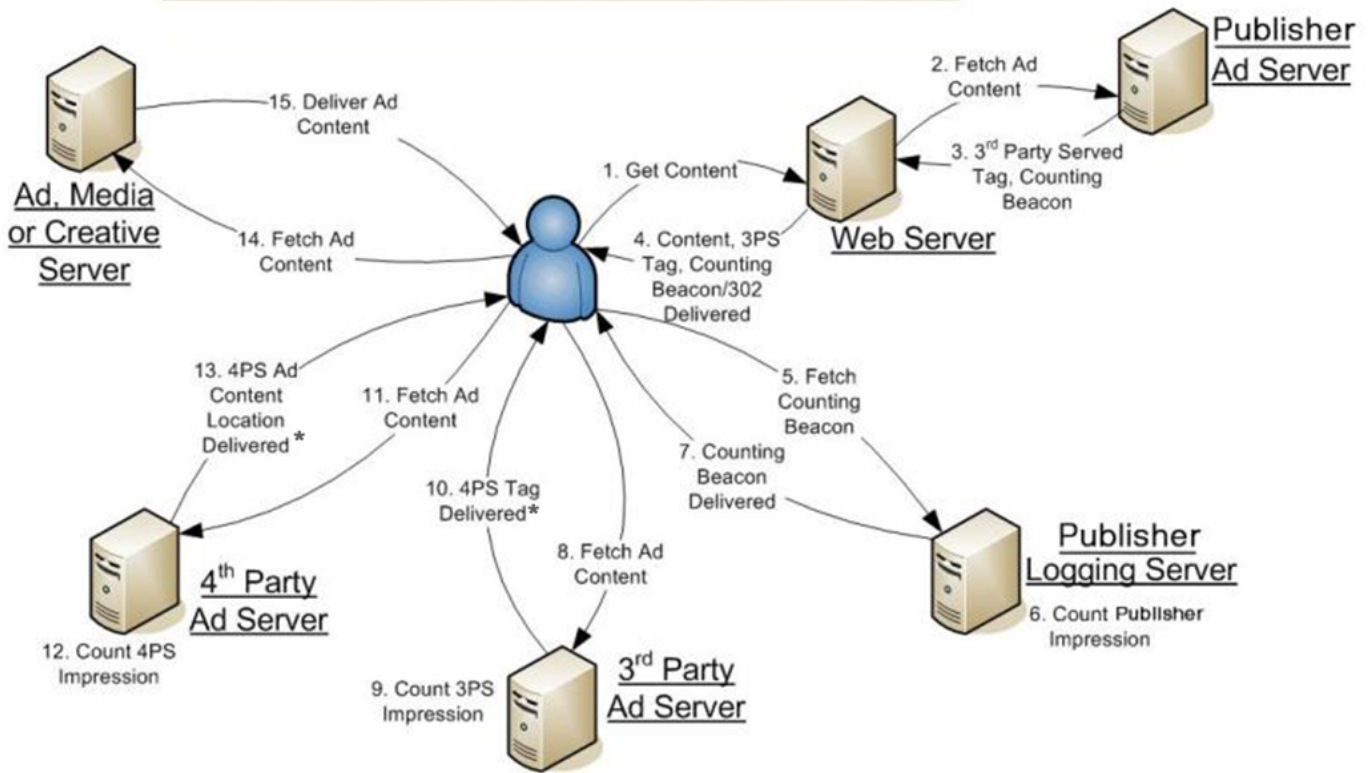
• Publisher and 3PS impression counts may occur simultaneously or consecutively





### Publisher and 4<sup>th</sup> Party Ad Delivery & Logging Process

- Publisher and 3PS impression counts may occur simultaneously or consecutively
- 4PS impression count always occurs after 3PS impression count



\* In some instances, the 3rd party ad server serves up the ad content and the redirect to the 4th party ad server or subsequent ad servers is for impression tracking or other purposes