



Mobile Discrepancies 2.0

An updated look on the state of Mobile Discrepancies including common issues, resolutions and paths forward.

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This document has been developed by the IAB Mobile Ad Ops Working Group, part of the IAB's Mobile Marketing Center of Excellence.

About the IAB's Mobile Ad Ops Working Group: The Mobile Ad Ops Working Group is dedicated to improving the operational efficiency of mobile advertising. The group meets regularly to talk through the challenges of mobile ad operations and undertakes initiatives aimed at improving the understanding and work processes of the mobile ad operations function. A full list of committee member companies can be found at http://www.iab.net/mobile_ad_ops_working_group

About the IAB's Mobile Marketing Center of Excellence: The IAB Mobile Marketing Center of Excellence, an independently funded and staffed unit inside the IAB, is charged with driving the growth of the mobile marketing, advertising and media marketplace. The Mobile Center devotes resources to market and consumer research, mobile advertising case studies, executive training and education, supply chain standardization, creative showcases and best practice identification in the burgeoning field of mobile media and marketing. Our agenda focuses on building profitable revenue growth for companies engaged in mobile marketing, communications and advertising, and helping publishers, marketers and agency professionals understand and leverage interactive tools and technologies in order to reach and influence the consumer. More information can be found at: <http://www.iab.net/mobile>

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Overview

This piece is a follow-up to last year's [Mobile Discrepancies](#) whitepaper. This paper expands on the earlier work by presenting new research on the state of mobile discrepancies based on a survey of over 85 publishers, ad servers, ad networks, data providers, DSPs, exchanges, rich media vendors and agencies. In this paper we also provide updated and in-depth guidance on troubleshooting mobile discrepancies before, during and after a campaign.

Intended Audience

This paper is written for anyone seeking to learn and understand more about mobile discrepancies. Specifically it is written for anyone with a beginner to intermediate level understanding of ad operations. The content of this paper can also be useful to those looking to understand reasonable causes, expectations and amounts of mobile discrepancies when looking to plan things such as contracts, budgets, or integrate with vendors along the ad serving chain.

Introduction

Anyone who has spent time working in digital media and advertising is familiar with one of the peskier parts of the job: *troubleshooting discrepancies*. Discrepancies occur on every digital platform and refer to buyers, sellers, vendors and other players in the digital advertising supply chain reporting different counts of the number of ads delivered in a campaign and/or the number of clicks, conversions or other measured “actions”. In more mature platforms such as desktop, discrepancies are traditionally very low – around 5-10%. However as newer platforms emerge with a multitude of devices, displays, operating systems, environments and connectivity discrepancies become much harder to manage, predict and investigate. According to last year’s IAB paper on the topic; mobile discrepancies can range from 5-50% depending on a number of factors. This serves as a follow-up to last year’s initial investigation into mobile discrepancies. Here we will present updated research and expand upon tips and best practices for working to troubleshoot, understand and manage mobile discrepancies.

Common Causes Revisited

One thing that has remained constant about mobile discrepancies has been their most common root causes. As detailed last year, these include **human error, ad serving sequence, reporting and targeting**. The good news is that many of these things can be planned for in advance or identified during the campaign in order to determine the best remedy. While this takes cooperation from multiple pieces of the ad serving chain – after these issues are initially addressed, it is for the benefit of all future campaigns as well. For a more thorough explanation of each root cause you can refer to the [September 2013 Mobile Discrepancies paper](#), but listed below are a recap of the main considerations in each category:

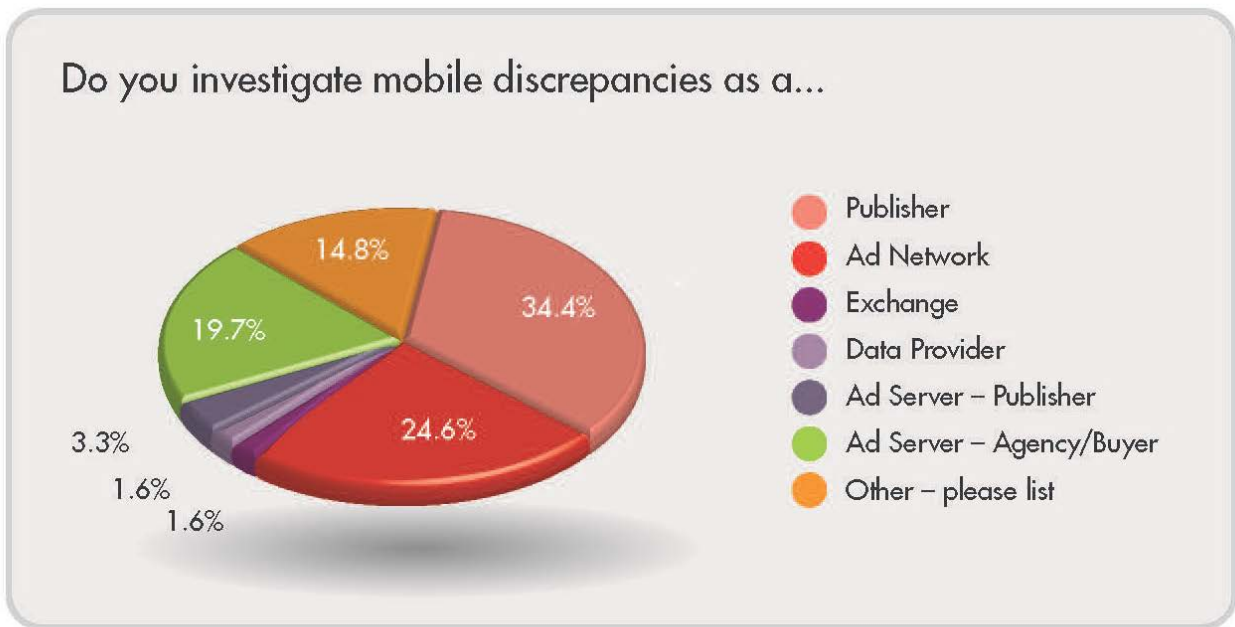
- Human Error
 - Pixel Implementation
 - Macro Implementation
 - HTML5 Creatives
 - Incorrect Settings
- Ad Serving Sequence
 - Internet Connectivity Issues/Latency
 - Short Session Times
 - Caching
 - Difference in Counting Methodology
- Reporting
 - Time Zone
 - Traffic Validation/Report Filtration
 - User Agents
 - Behavior Validation
 - No Referral URL
 - Server Side vs. Client Side Counting
 - Differences in Terminology/Definitions

- Targeting
 - Targeting by Device Characteristics
 - Geo/Location Based Targeting

Mobile Discrepancies Research Results

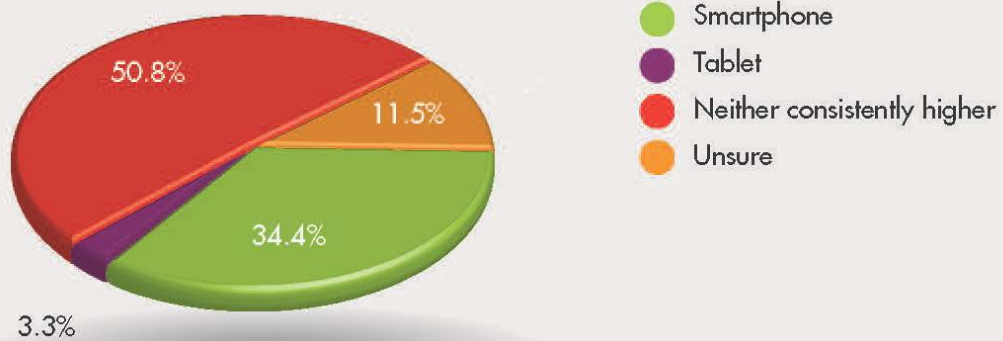
Each year the IAB’s Mobile Ad Ops working group hosts a mobile discrepancies survey to gauge the current status, and progress, of the issue among the digital advertising industry. This year’s survey consisted of over 85 publishers, ad servers, ad networks, data providers, DSPs, exchanges, rich media vendors and agencies. While the overall results showed that many still struggle with unpredictable and higher than desktop levels of mobile discrepancies, other interesting survey findings are detailed below. These inform the updated guidance for working with discrepancies provided in the next section.

1. Though there was representation from each piece of the supply chain, the majority of this year’s respondents were publishers, ad networks, and agency (or buy side) ad servers:



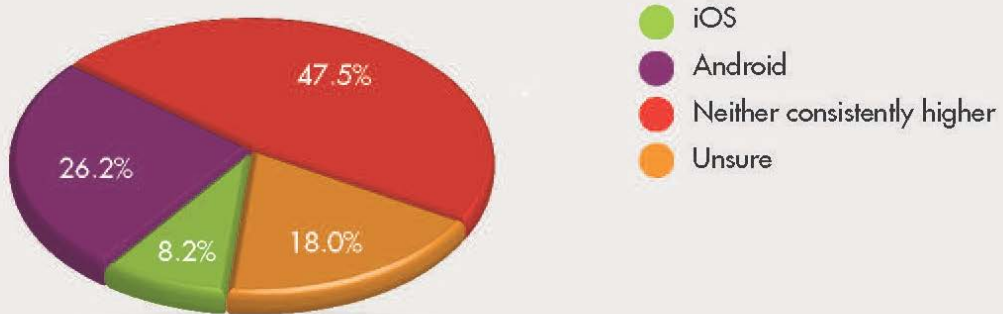
2. The majority agreed that neither smartphones nor tablets provided consistently higher discrepancy rates. Of those who did think device played a role, many reported smartphones as being a more consistent cause of discrepancies.

Where do you experience higher discrepancy percentages?

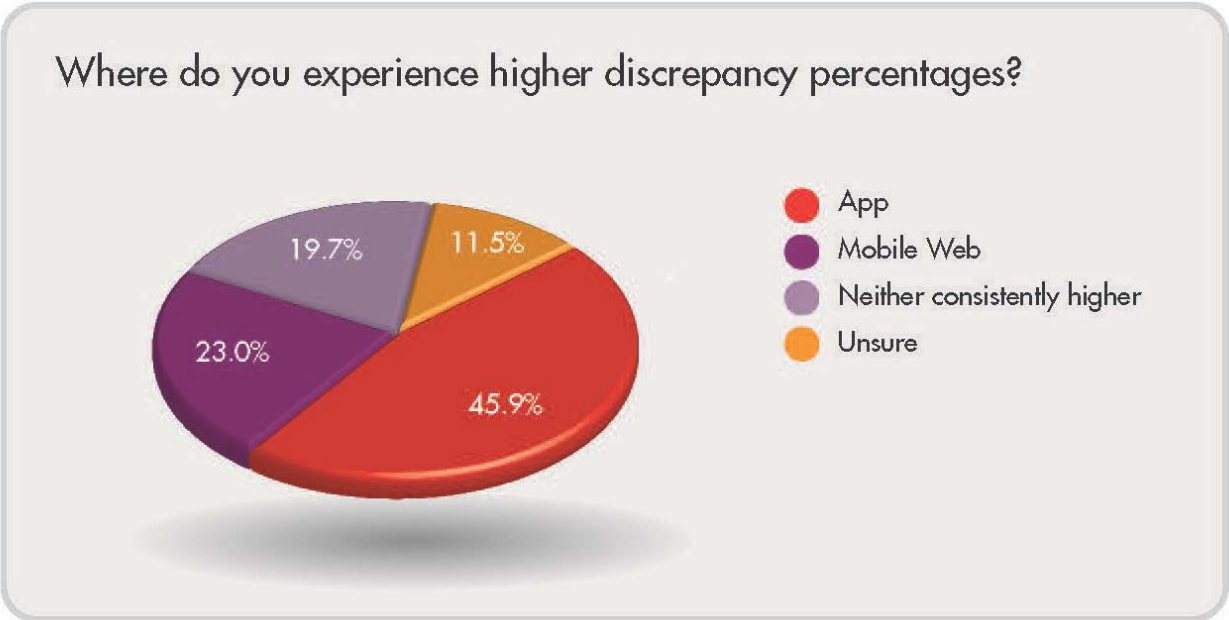


3. The majority agreed that type of operating system was not a factor in experiencing consistently higher discrepancy rates. Of those who did think OS played a role, more reported Android as a more cause of discrepancies than cited iOS.

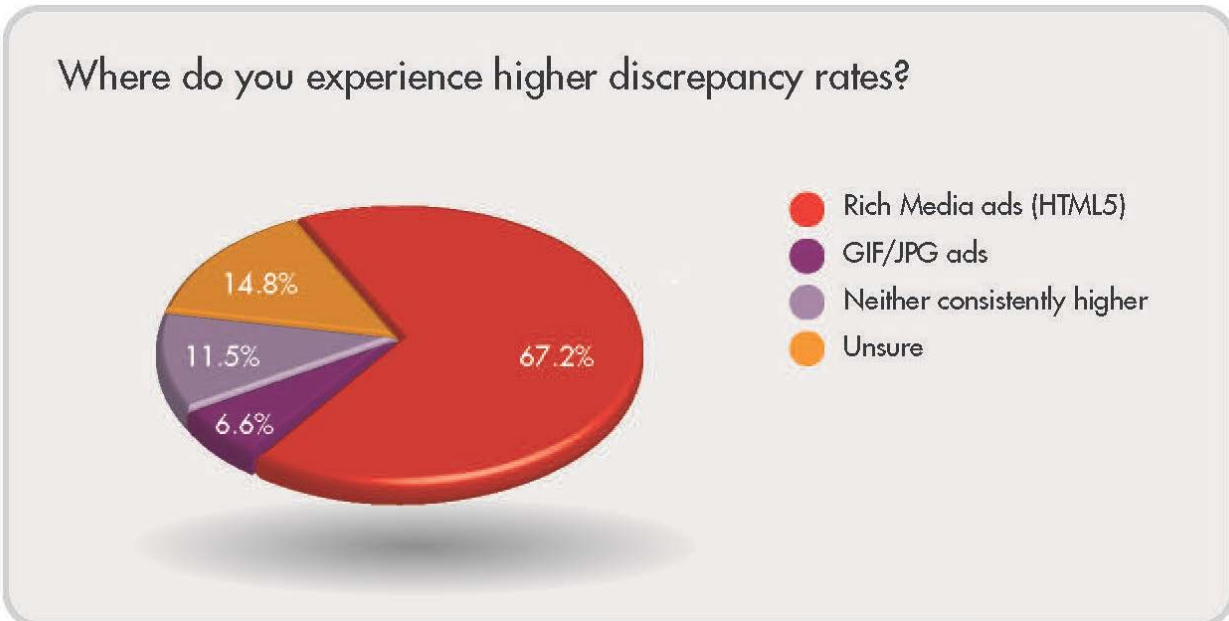
Where do you experience higher discrepancy percentages?



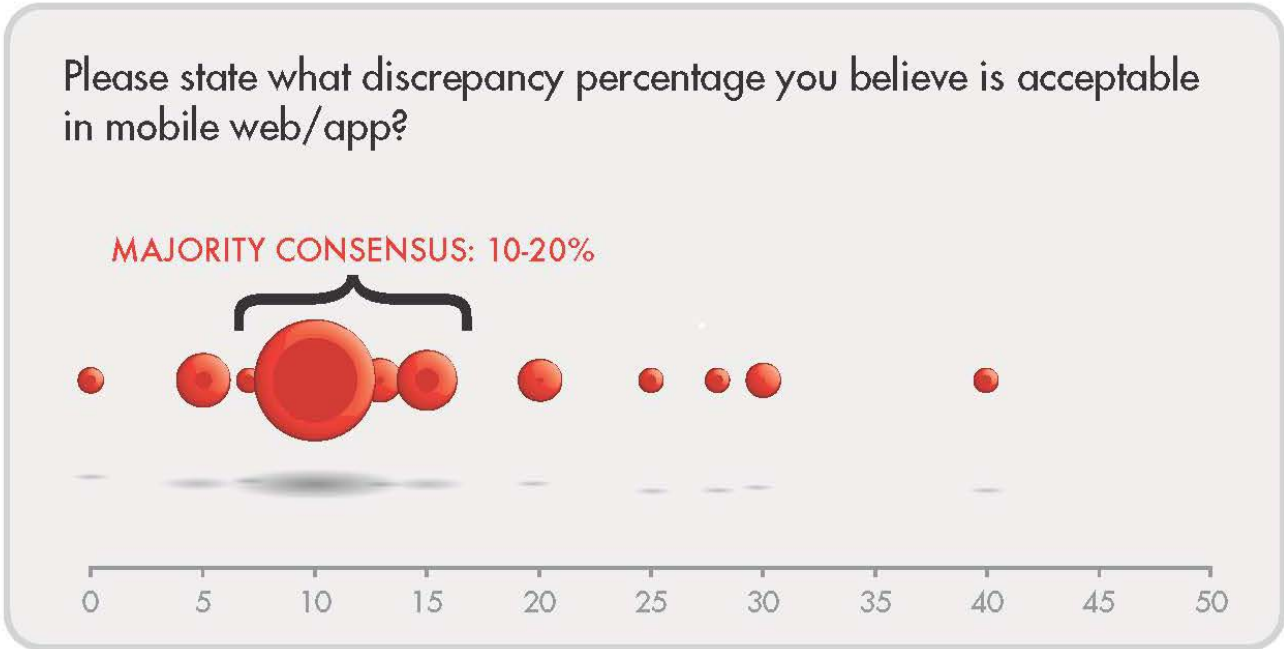
4. Almost half of respondents cited mobile application environments as a bigger contributor to high discrepancy levels than mobile web.



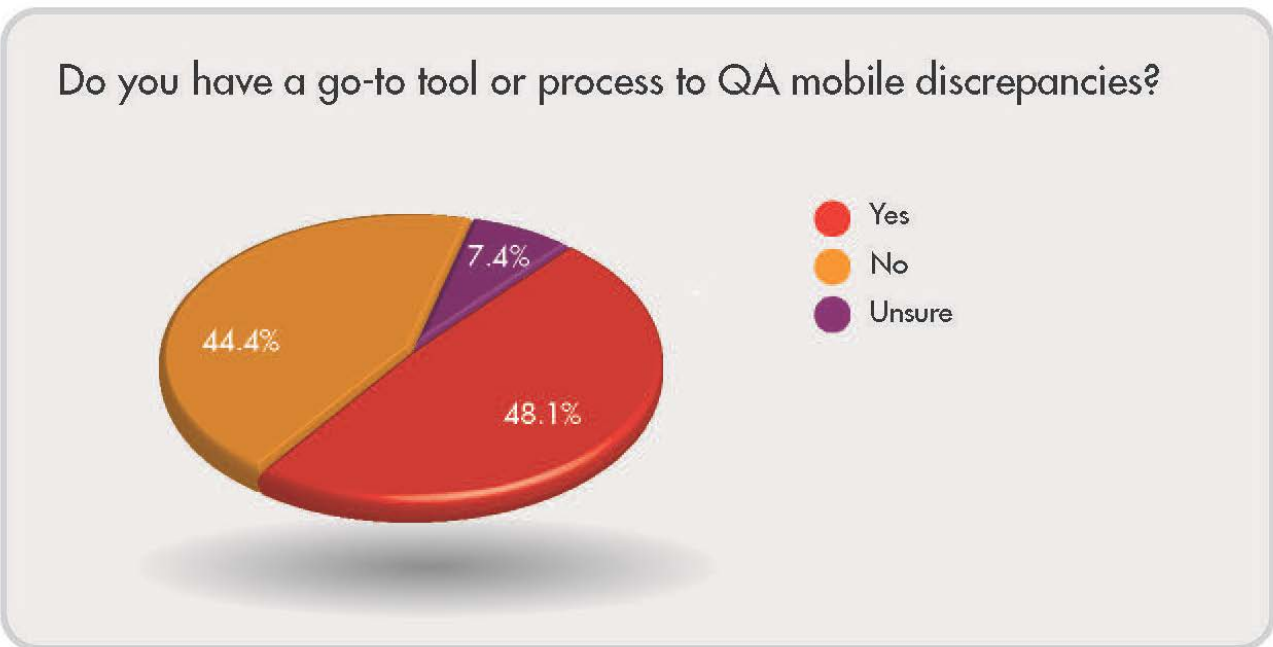
5. The overwhelming majority cited rich media formats as another main contributor to consistently higher discrepancy levels.



6. While many report experiencing unpredictable and higher-than-desktop discrepancy rates for mobile campaigns, when asked what an “acceptable” number would be for mobile discrepancies, the overwhelming consensus was between 10-20%.



7. Lastly, we found that over half of the respondents do not have a go-to process for troubleshooting or investigating discrepancies. With this in mind the end of this paper provides updated guidance for working with discrepancies on a campaign level.



Updated Guidance: Working with Mobile Discrepancies

While general guidance and best practices for working with and troubleshooting mobile discrepancies have not changed drastically, below is a more thorough checklist of actions that ad ops staff can take during various phases of a campaign to try and mitigate or alleviate discrepancies.

Pre-flight

Below are steps to take during campaign setup to help ensure clear communications, expectations and proper functionality when preparing to launch a campaign. Many of these depend on clear communication between all parties and represent best practices for successful campaign setup.

1. Ensure clarification on all steps of the ad serving chain and what companies and steps will be involved in ad delivery. (e.g. A third party ad server through demand side platform to an exchange and finally an ad network SDK.)
 - o Have all involved parties conducted testing of their interfaces to verify impression and click measurement?
 - o Has an end-to-end test or certification been completed?
 - If not, request that each interface be tested independently.
 - o Are any steps cached? If so, verify cache busters.
 - o In what system are the creatives trafficked and has the setup been verified (mobile web tag using HTML5, MRAID tag for in-app).
 - o For rich media creative, ensure all targeted publishers support the ad format(s) that will be used for the campaign.
2. Ensure clarification on inventory type.
 - o Which operating systems will be targeted, what type of inventory (app vs. mobile web), is javascript enabled?
 - o If buying from multiple inventory sources at once, consider adding a unique ID to each creative tag (or using a separate tag) so that any discrepancies that occur can be isolated to a unique source during campaign reporting.
3. Communicate reporting frequency (including time zone) and needs pre-flight to ensure ability to troubleshoot. Again these issues must be communicated across the full supply chain.

Mid-flight

Below is troubleshooting advice for discrepancy issues that arise during the campaign.

1. If discrepancies above 20% arise during a campaign then conduct the following:
 - o Run a report to see if you can pinpoint the source of the discrepancies to one specific campaign, site, app, publisher or inventory source.
 - o If the discrepancy source can be isolated then perform a direct test to verify if creative renders without any intermediary entities in the ad serving chain.
 - o If discrepancies are not isolated to a specific campaign, site, app, publisher or inventory source then confirm set up to investigate:
 - Trafficking errors
 - Creative tags
 - Pixel tracking
 - Redirecting ad calls

- Browser settings/issues
- iFrames
- SDK-specific creative tag format
- Run de-bugger tools/sessions (e.g. Charles)
- User agent testing/switching?

Post-campaign

After the completion of the campaign all learnings from the above steps should be disseminated through the organization and ad delivery chain for increased success and performance of future campaigns. Post-campaign is also the optimal time to continue dialogue with technology providers to isolate issues identified during the campaign for future optimizations and prevention.

The Road Ahead

Throughout the group's work this year it became apparent that mobile discrepancies still present challenges for buyer and sellers. However, on the brighter side, more parties are becoming aware of this issue and working together to find sustainable solutions. For example, in this year's survey 53.7% of respondents reported that agencies were willing to help troubleshoot issues with discrepancies and of those 54.8% found this additional support helpful in resolving issues. As stakeholders along the value chain become more involved in addressing and solving discrepancies - more technologies, solutions and best practices are sure to emerge moving mobile closer to its desktop forerunner. It will be of chief importance to approach this issue from a mobile-first perspective, understanding mobile user behavior (such as the ability to engage with mobile apps and receive ads while devices are not connected to the internet) when formulating approaches to the issue. For its part the IAB will continue its research into the issue along with broad buy side education and continuing to set expectations across the market as we work towards a future of predictably low discrepancies.

Resources

- The 2013 IAB Ad Ops Working Group's [Mobile Discrepancies](#) offers an initial deep dive into the root causes of mobile discrepancies and high-level guidance on campaign setup.
- The IAB UK [Discrepancy Buster](#) paper offers additional guidance on root causes and corrections.
- The 2013 IAB UK [Mobile Discrepancy FAQ](#) gives a high level Q&A of mobile discrepancies.