IAB/MRC Retail Media Measurement Guidelines Explainer



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Introduction

he retail media landscape is evolving rapidly, as retailers big and small launch their own advertising and analytics platforms to court brands and agencies. Although ad spend on retail media is predicted to reach \$60 billion in the U.S. alone by 2024, the lack of consistent measurement standards across retailers has raised concerns. To address these challenge, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and the Media Rating Council (MRC) have released the IAB/MRC Retail Media Measurement Guidelines.

The new guidelines outline best practices for retail media networks in everything from data collection and reporting to viewability metrics and audience measurement. For retailers, brands, and agencies grappling with the rapid growth of retail media, these guidelines provide a much-needed framework for gauging performance, optimizing investments, and building trust on both the buy and sell sides.

A Peek into the Guidelines

The primary objective of the IAB/MRC Retail Media Measurement Guidelines is to develop a modern measurement framework that encompasses onsite, offsite, online, and in-store ads, and facilitates collaboration between the buy and sell sides. The guidelines are based on four General Measurement Principles, listed below with summaries of their essential components:



Transparency and Consistency

Standardized definitions and methodologies



Accuracy and Reliability

Advanced methodologies and technologies to minimize errors

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Privacy and Security

Upholding regulations such as GDPR and CCPA, ensuring robust data protection



Compliance with Industry Standards

Conformity with best practices set by the MRC, IAB, and other industry stakeholders







Key Implications of the New Measurement Guidelines

What Retailers Need to Do

For retailers powering their own media networks, the new IAB guidelines, paired with existing MRC standards and guidelines, have several technology and process compliance implications. Recommendations for retailers:

- Implement viewability tracking for ads served onsite as well as offsite. This includes adding necessary pixels, tags, and code for viewability vendors.
- Measure viewability consistently across devices and platforms. Apply specific click qualifiers for desktop and mobile, recognizing the higher likelihood of accidental clicks as on mobile browsers and apps.
- Because retail sites may be prone to scraping, use frameworks like IAB/ABC's Spiders & Bots List to filter out invalid traffic (IVT).
- Conduct periodic audits and calibrate measurement tools to maintain data quality and accuracy.
- Provide robust disclosure on methodologies used for measurement, data adjustment, or modeling.
- Maintain transparency regarding measurement partners, data sources, and attribution models used.
- Report online and in-store sales/outcomes separately.
- Adhere to privacy regulations and data protection best practices. Anonymize, aggregate, or mask data as required.

What Brands Should Ask

The guidelines enable brands advertising on retail media platforms to advocate for transparency, consistency, and accuracy. Some questions for brands to discuss with their retail media partners:

- What viewability metrics are you providing? How are you measuring viewability?
- Are you MRC-accredited? If not, are you compliant with IAB/MRC standards?
- How are you detecting and filtering invalid traffic (IVT) on your platform?
- How do you track online vs. offline sales? How do you attribute sales to different marketing touchpoints, and what sales do you count?
- How do you model attribution for unknown data? What are the data assumptions and how are you minimizing data bias?
- For in-store media, how are proximity and viewability measured?
- How are you adhering to privacy regulations and protecting consumer data?

Having clear answers to these questions as per the IAB/MRC Guidelines will help brands invest with confidence and optimize spend on retail media.



Why Agencies Should Care

For agencies managing investment across retail media platforms, the guidelines enable stronger governance for this channel. Requirements for agencies:

- Guide brands toward requiring transparency from retailers as per the IAB/MRC Guidelines.
- Conduct audits and assessments of retail media partners on behalf of brands.
- Highlight viewability and invalid traffic (IVT) filtration as necessary capabilities when evaluating partners.
- Analyze retail media performance data with skepticism; clarify uncertainties in measurement and modeling.
- Provide independent perspective on attribution models and sales impact claimed by retailers.
- Ensure retailers' adherence to data transparency, privacy, and security requirements.
- Agencies play a key advocacy role for brands in what remains a nascent, complex channel. With their breadth of media expertise and client rosters, they can help elevate standards across RMNs based on the IAB/MRC Guidelines.

The Road Ahead

By rallying industry stakeholders around a common set of guidelines, IAB and MRC have taken an important first step. Continued work will be needed, including:



With proactive collaboration across brands, agencies, retailers, and industry partners IAB and MRC, the future looks bright for retail media. But measurement will remain the bedrock, guiding investment toward greater efficiency and effectiveness.

How to Use This Explainer

- 1. Review Each Chapter of the Guidelines: This guide contains an "explainer" for each chapter in the IAB/MRC Guidelines so your team can identify the most important points and where you need a more in-depth understanding. Each chapter also includes key takeaways for RMNs.
- 2. Implement and Validate: Use the guidelines to shape your strategies and periodically validate their efficacy.
- 3. Engage with the Ecosystem: Collaboration is key. Regular interaction across brands, agencies, and RMNs will reinforce collective adherence to, and sharing of, best practices.



Guidelines Chapter 1 Data Collection, Processing, and Quality Control

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- Ensure you have validation and verification (e.g., comparing data against known benchmarks and checking across sources) set up for all your data sources.
- Establish secure and compliant data storage (through, e.g., encryption, access control, data retention policies).
- >>>> Standardize and regularly validate (annually, at a minimum) measurement methodologies.
- >>>> To maintain data quality, explore third-party audits of data processes, implement data cleaning measures to detect and filter out invalid traffic (IVT), and provide confidence intervals in data reporting.

Retailers can take steps in two key areas to ensure quality data:

Data collection and processing

- Employ a unified approach to capture, aggregate, and process data, ensuring accuracy and minimizing bias across diverse data sources.
- Conduct regular and robust data quality assurance practices including source validation, consistency checks, and data cleaning.
- Establish secure and compliant data storage practices and clear data retention policies.



Data quality checks and monitoring

- Ensure data accuracy, consistency, and completeness via calibrated tools, standardized data collection and measurement methodologies, and integration of data from multiple sources.
- Filter out invalid traffic (e.g., bots) and duplicates; maintain and update list of filters by subscribing to IAB/ABCs Spiders & Bots List.
- Implement robust data processing and quality control procedures via data cleansing, filtering, validating, and monitoring.
- Regularly audit data quality review processes through independent third-party reviews to ensure adherence to quality standards.
- Include error rates and confidence intervals in data reporting.







Guidelines Chapter 2 Audience Measurement and Metrics

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- >>> Ensure counting is done as close as possible to final ad delivery, filter out IVT (e.g., bots), and disclose measurement methods.
- >>> Invest in loyalty programs to enhance customer identification and allow for more effective audience measurement and segmentation (e.g., geographic, demographic, behavioral).
- >>> Capture accurate audience size and engagement, actual ad interaction, campaign frequency, and duration of ad exposure.
- >>>> Maintain transparent consumer privacy policies and opt-in practices for cross-device tracking.
- >>> For identifying users across devices, prioritize a deterministic (relying on personally identifiable information) over a probabilistic (utilizing anonymous data points and signal correlations) approach to maximize accuracy.

For retail media, the bare minimum measurement capabilities RMNs provide to brands should include clear audience segmentation, understanding of audience level, reach, and frequency and identity matching for identification of unique users across devices.

Potential audience features

- Demographic: age, gender, income, education, occupation
- Geographic: country, region, city, postal code
- Behavioral: browsing history, search queries, purchase history
- Psychographic: personality, values, attitudes, lifestyle
- Third-party audience: other organizations' audience segmentation (not required for retailers)

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Metrics and methodologies for capturing audience reach and engagement

- For audience size and engagement, tracking how frequently an ad is seen via viewable impressions, unique visitors, dwell time
- Actual ad interactions captured through clicks, taps, or swipes
- Intensity of reach and `potential impact tracked via frequency and duration of ad exposure

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Identity-matching techniques



- Deterministic: Best for identifying users across devices; leverages personally identifiable information for device match
- **Probabilistic**: Utilizes anonymous data points and signal correlations for device match

Limitations: Deterministic methods struggle with scale and cross-device user identification, while probabilistic methods are less accurate due to reliance on modeled data

• Hybrid: Enhances accuracy and scalability when user-level data is limited







Guidelines Chapter 3 Digital Ad Delivery and Viewability

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- >>> Report on all MRC-required viewability-related metrics, including viewable impressions and ad completion metrics, for video and interactive ads.
- Meet MRC general invalid traffic (GIVT) requirements and strive for sophisticated invalid traffic (SIVT) compliance.
- >>> Move towards using viewable impressions for attribution of outcomes.
- >>> Provide relevant data elements to advertisers to use in their marketing mix model (MMM).
- >>>> Disclose attribution windows (lookback periods) and extrapolation techniques when consumers unidentified.

Retailers can take steps in two key areas to ensure quality data:



Ad Impressions:

Ad impressions are counted when delivered ads render on a user's device without a guarantee that the ad was viewed.

Viewable Impressions:

Actual visibility is measured via viewable impressions, with display ads requiring 50% of pixels visible for one continuous second and video ads needing 50% visibility for two continuous seconds.



Invalid Traffic (IVT):

General invalid traffic (GIVT) is required to be removed; best-in-class organizations will also remove sophisticated invalid traffic (SIVT). Outcome measurement that does not include SIVT filtration should have clear disclaimers, and be reported separately. Retailers can employ site governance to block nefarious bot activity and report on it differently, but it must still be included in GIVT.



Reporting Requirements:

Granular (i.e. user/instance) reporting on impressions, viewability, video duration, completion metrics, and IVT filtration are required as part of IAB/MRC Guidelines and Standards.



Outcome Metrics

Outcome metrics (e.g., clicks) are used to evaluate the effectiveness/impact of online and offline ad campaigns.

Viewable impressions are required for attribution of outcomes to ad exposures; attribution metrics for non-viewable impressions should be accompanied by disclaimers.

Outcome measurement methodologies—like strong user interactions (clicks/taps), first-party data (panels/ surveys), and randomized control experiments—can act as alternatives to viewability requirements, but should undergo strict quality control to minimize biases and errors.

Ads should measure clicks in line with IAB/MRC standards, ensuring click resolution, linking clicks to valid impressions, and directly associating these clicks with attributed conversions.



Attribution

Appropriate weighting, windowing, modeled attribution of unknown data, and bias minimization are key elements of attribution for properly assigning credit for consumer actions (e.g., visits, sales).

Retail media measurement organizations should adopt consistent and comparable attribution windows (typically 3, 7, 14, 28, or 30 days) for digital measurement; establish a reasonable maximum window with clear disclosure to users; and provide day-level data granularity for reconciling differences across various attribution windows.

Advertisers should be provided with data including DMA, format, time, daily/weekly, impressions, clicks, campaign, audience, device, and cost to facilitate integration with a brand's MMM.



Traffic Sources:

Measured activity segmentation and disclosure by traffic sources (e.g., site banner, onsite search, offline search, offline social, etc.) at a campaign level.





Guidelines Chapter 4 Guidelines and Best Practices When Measuring Incrementality

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- >>>> Measure incrementality using one of the IAB-recommended methods: randomized control trials, synthetic controls, or matched-market tests.
- >>>> Disclose chosen incrementality methodology, assumptions, and limitations; use third-party audits for validity and accuracy; retain raw data for auditing.

Incrementality in retail media quantifies the causal impact of marketing strategies on outcomes such as sales, isolated from other business influences and attributed to advertising campaigns.

1 Methodologies

- **Randomized control trials (RCT)** or A/B tests randomly assign individuals to different conditions to assess their impact using statistical techniques (e.g., t-tests, analysis of covariance, and regression analysis) to compare effectiveness across two groups.
- **Synthetic controls** are used to calculate campaign sales lift by creating a post-campaign control group of non-exposed consumers with characteristics similar to those of exposed ones. When employing such controls, consider factors like purchase and digital behavior, employ propensity scoring, and criteria to avoid bias.
- **Matched-market tests** (common for in-store media) are used to compare two similar markets—one targeted in a marketing campaign and one not to observe incremental impact. Methodological rigor in order to isolate the incremental sales effect and minimize data bias is important.
- **Other machine learning models** are used to measure the increase of specific outcome metrics caused by a campaign. (This usually involves building a more complex predictive model.)

2 Data Types

- **Deterministic data** is highly accurate, using precise user data (e.g., login data, user IDs, loyalty program data) and should be prioritized to form the baseline of incremental analysis.
- **Probabilistic data** predicts user behavior using statistical techniques and should be used in multi-platform scenarios when deterministic data is insufficient.

3 Data Sources

Media spend data: spend on each channel from impressions or clicks; deterministic
Sales data: marketing KPIs; detverministic

two mostly commonly used data sources

- Competitor and market conditions data: usually sourced from third parties/public databases
- **Customer attitudinal data:** e.g., customer sentiment and brand awareness; probabilistic
- Digital data: data from digital platforms such as click-through rates and web analytics data

Limitation: Incrementality within the retailer's ecosystem may not consider broader market impact.

4 Transparency

- MRC standards stress transparency in incrementality methodology, assumptions, and limitations.
- Ensure accuracy in data reporting and run periodic validation:
 - § For deterministic data, validate data completeness, consistency, and reliability.
 - § For probabilistic/synthetic data, use well-established statistical methods and validate models with actual data.
- Retain raw data for auditing; document data processing procedures.





Guidelines Chapter 5 Reporting and Transparency

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- »» Adhere to privacy regulations (e.g., proper permissions, clear privacy policies, bias disclosure, privacy impact assessments).
- Provide granular reporting, going beyond just clicks to include metrics such as resolved clicks, post-click activity, and \gg conversions, broken down by viewability metrics such as device type, ad format, size, placement, and timing.
- Disclose measurement methods, partners, limitations, biases, and non-viewable/non-measured impressions. \gg
- »» Explore metrics for capturing campaign impact more appropriately than ROAS—e.g., new-to-brand/new-to-category, category share growth, or digital shelf share.

Important considerations for retail media reporting metrics:

IAB defines the following metrics:

- Category Share Growth Measures advertised brand growth against overall category growth during a media campaign. Methodology involves a before-and-after analysis for directional insights, accounting for factors beyond ad exposure.
- Category Change Assesses growth or decline in total sales within a category over time. Methodology considers multiple factors like new entrants, seasonality, and market pressures, with retailer responsibility for reporting category trends and brand share shifts.
- Attributable Direct Sales/ROAS/Conversions Tracks outcomes attributed to viewable ads per MRC standards, associated with specific SKUs or determined by the brand partner. Methodology requires disclosure if attribution is based on viewability or extrapolation.
- % of New Buyers Identifies the number or percentage of new brand buyers who saw an ad within a specific timeframe. Retailers must provide a transparent methodology, including time-based grading models.
- New-to-Brand/New-to-Category/Upsell/Cross-sell Defines new buyers of a brand or in a category and those purchasing higher-priced or different products within the same brand. Methodology requires transparency on timeframe definitions and participation of brands/agencies in defining measured units.
- Repeat Customers/Purchase Frequency Measures shoppers buying the same product within a defined timeframe but not in the same session. Methodology includes transparent timeframe definitions and attribution windows.
- **Incrementality** Assesses the causal impact of marketing on outcomes like sales or advertising campaigns. Methodology requires observed incremental impact of exposure compared to synthetic control ads and compares a variety of factors and considerations.
- Halo/Assisted Outcomes/Influenced Outcomes Evaluates ad interactions contributing to sales without direct attribution credit. Methodology should include transparency on brand and category matching, SKU attribution, and calculations accounting for unmeasurable media.
- Digital Shelf Share Calculates SKU placements within search results or category pages relative to others in the category. Methodology should disclose if it covers organic, paid, or both types of placements and specify the timeframe.
- Conversion Volume Focuses on online conversion volume based on orders per visit, or units per event. Methodology requires transparency on distinctions between online and offline conversions and differentiation in measurement approaches.
- Online vs. Offline Distinction in Reporting Distinguishes between online and offline sales attribution, including digital and omni outcomes or influenced outcomes, and requires transparent reporting methodologies.

Best-in-class reporting will:

- Go beyond core requirements with metrics that clarify retail media performance and align with brand needs;
- Disclose measurement methodologies and properly label metrics for data users;
- Make use of IAB/MRC Guidelines, which outline definitions and methodologies for specific KPIs, to standardize reporting for ease of use by all stakeholders.





Guidelines Chapter 6 In-Store Digital Place-Based Environments Measurement

Key Takeaways for RMNs:

- Divide physical stores into standardized zones to measure traffic in particular areas within a store.
- >>> Count the audience for a digital place-based ad based on both presence and viewability, using reasonable thresholds for audience inclusion in eligible exposure zones based on display position/size and audibility.
- Disclose and regularly audit methods for digital place-based media measurement including venue traffic counts, screen traffic counts, screen audience estimate, and average ad unit audience estimate.
- >>> For in-store validation, utilize in-store audits, third-party validation, real-time monitoring, and data validation protocols, and maintain data collection devices.

Important considerations when measuring in-store digital place-based environments:

In-Store Zones

- Use a consistent definition of zones across the variety of store footprints for a given retailer.
- The object of standardizing zones is to ensure consistent taxonomy across retailers so that brands
 - can compare performance and insights as in-store retail media moves to digitization.

Viewability

Ensure the following viewability conditions are met when counting the audience for an ad:

- An individual is present at the venue, meeting reasonable proximity thresholds where the ad can be seen for an appropriate length of time (i.e., dwell time).
- At least 50% of the ad's pixels are visible for a minimum of two seconds.



Audibility

Ensure the following audio conditions are met when counting the audience for an ad:

- An individual is present at the venue, meeting reasonable proximity thresholds where the ad can be heard for an appropriate length of time.
- Audio is played at a volume that allows individuals to hear it.



In-Store Validation

Ensure the accuracy and reliability of audience measurement data in digital place-based environments.

- Conduct in-store audits (e.g., verify data collection device functionality and audience count accuracy).
- Use third-party validation services.
- Use real-time monitoring systems to track and validate audience measurement data.
- Establish standardized data validation protocols and regularly calibrate and maintain data collection devices.

General Requirements for In-Store Measurement

Disclose the methodologies behind the calculation of the following measurements:

- venue traffic count;
- screen traffic counts based on traffic in individual zones;
- audience estimates screened to represent those with opportunity to see/hear the content;
- average ad unit audience based on number of individuals who saw/heard an ad, plus dwell time.







Contributors to IAB/MRC Guidelines

This explainer document was produced by BCG to summarize IAB & MRC's collaborative Retail Media Measurement Guidelines. The guidelines underlying this explainer are available <u>here</u>, and were compiled through the collaboration of a broad range of RMNs, brands, tech partners, and agencies:

Albertsons Media Collective	Instacart	Quividi
Alliance for Audited Media	Kellogg Company	Samba TV
Amazon	Kevel	Shipt
Arc Worldwide	Kroger Precision Marketing	SMG
AutoZone	Koddi	Target
Best Buy Ads	Liveramp	The Coca-Cola Company
Circana	L'Oréal	The Mars Agency
Cooler Screens	Medill Spiegel Research Center	The Trade Desk
CitrusAd	Meta	Threefold-Agency
Crealytics	Microsoft	TikTok
Criteo	Mindshare	Transact
CVS Media Exchange	Monster Energy	TransUnion
Dart Innovation	NBCU	Uber
DG Media Network	Night Market	Ulta Beauty
Eli Lilly & Company	Nordstrom Media	UM Worldwide
Epsilon	Oracle	Unilever
Essence Mediacom	Pacvue	Vibenomics
Fairlife	Path to Purchase Institute	VML Y&R, Commerce
General Mills	Peapod Digital Labs	Walgreens
Goodway Group	Pinterest	Walmart Connect
Google	Procter & Gamble	Walton College
Grocery TV	Publicis Groupe	Yahoo Advertising
GroupM	Publicis Media	
Horizon Media	PubMatic	
Incremental	Quad	
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About BCG, IAB, MRC, and the authors

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The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) empowers the media and marketing industries to thrive in the digital economy. Its membership comprises more than 700 leading media companies, brands, agencies, and the technology firms responsible for selling, delivering, and optimizing digital ad marketing campaigns. The trade group fields critical research on interactive advertising, while also educating brands, agencies, and the wider business community on the importance of digital marketing. In affiliation with the IAB Tech Lab, IAB develops technical standards and solutions. IAB is committed to professional development and elevating the knowledge, skills, expertise, and diversity of the workforce across the industry. Through the work of its public policy office in Washington, D.C., the trade association advocates for its members and promotes the value of the interactive advertising industry to legislators and policymakers. Founded in 1996, IAB is headquartered in New York City.

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The Media Rating Council (MRC) is a non-profit industry association established in 1963 comprised of leading television, radio, print and digital media companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and trade associations, whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. Measurement services desiring MRC accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research as well as other applicable industry measurement guidelines; and submit to MRC-designed audits to authenticate and illuminate their procedures. In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the marketplace.

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