Principles for Managing Advertising Viewability in Professional Medical Media

(As of April 2016)

Introduction:

Inarguably, an ad must be within human view to have any impact whatsoever, and fraud should never be tolerated. Driven largely by the questionable business practices of many web sites in the consumer space, the advertising community is now demanding definitive assurances that their advertising is actually visible to a human being.

The IAB, whose primary constituents are consumer advertisers and publishers, has attempted to address this challenge, as well as the many challenges inherent in measuring viewability and fairly accounting for it in billing, in its *State of Viewability Transactions 2015*[1] and accompanying *Frequently Asked Questions*.[2]

Application and implementation of these principles, however, has been a work in progress across the entire advertising and publishing industry. IAB named 2015 a "year of transition" when it released its *State of Viewability Transactions* in late 2014, and it wasn't until March 2016 that it published its *Primer for Publishers on Improving Ad Viewability*.[3] Clearly, implementing the business rules and infrastructure to manage Viewability, a state which continues to change and evolve as new questions arise, has challenged publishers, agencies and advertisers alike.

Viewability in Professional Medical Media

While the IAB standards and guidance are vital reference points, professional medical media differs from consumer media in several aspects. Medical publishers are held to the highest ethical standards, so fraud is all but non-existent. Medical specialty audiences are extremely small, so ad inventory is extremely limited. And advertising is subject to regulation that can tightly dictate when an ad can and can't appear, making some of the IAB standards impractical to facilitate.

In order to address these challenges for professional medical media, the AMM, following months of background work, convened in February 2016 the AMM Viewability Congress—an open meeting of publishers, advertisers, agencies and other key stakeholders—to gather testimony on the several key points outlined in a draft of these recommendations. The AMM Board of Directors, made up of all full publisher and agency members, informed by the discussions and polls taken at the Congress, voted on the key principles. A draft of these recommendations was then circulated and posted on AMMonline.org for public comment. The final document was revised based on those comments, and approved by the AMM Board of Directors on May 5, 2016.

Many medical media publishers have already implemented changes to their sites and business rules to address this new currency; however, association and STM (Science, Technical and Medical) publishers may take longer to adjust their sites

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[1] IAB State of Viewability Transactions 2015. http://www.iab.com/guidelines/state-of-viewability-transaction-2015. Accessed 2/23/16.

[2] IAB State of Viewability Transaction 2015 – Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.iab.com/guidelines/state-of-viewability-frequently-asked-questions. Accessed 2/23/16

[3] IAB Primer for Publishers on Improving Ad Viewability. http://www.iab.com/insights/viewability-primer-for-publishers/. Accessed 4/15/16.

due to society and association considerations. Publishers and advertisers should be willing to collaborate to achieve desired performance within the bounds of current realities.

AMM Principles for Professional Medical Media:

1. **Viewable impressions are one valid measure of campaign performance.**

   There is an almost unlimited variety of factors that can be measured to determine a campaign's success. The technological ability to accurately measure the various performance metrics, as well as the depth of understanding needed to correctly interpret the findings, can challenge even the most seasoned digital marketer. Although viewability may play a part in measuring campaign performance, objectives for each campaign must be clearly understood in order to determine the key performance indicators as optimizing a campaign against one metric can negatively impact the campaign's ability to deliver on other important metrics. Publishers, agencies and clients should work together to determine exactly how the viewable impression will be analyzed vis a vis other performance indicators.

2. **Medical media publishers should be prepared to tie payment to a viewability standard for agencies and clients desiring to do so.**

   Advertisers are increasingly demanding adherence to the IAB's viewability recommendations and standards. However, in medical media where inventory is scarce and campaigns have definitive expiration dates, providing make-good impressions (as recommended by IAB) is impractical for many publishers and advertisers, so tying payment to viewability may be the only option.

3. **Campaigns billed against viewability metrics will naturally be priced differently than those that are not.**

   As with any performance-based ad campaign, it is possible for publishers, working closely with their clients, to test, change and optimize each digital ad for viewability, but providing this service requires investments in both technology and staffing as the challenges are different from campaign to campaign. When ads are tied to viewability, the cost of doing business on the publisher side significantly increases while the available supply decreases. Not all agencies and not all clients require viewability, and may not wish to pay the price for those that do.

4. **Transactions based on viewability should be standardized to the IAB guidelines with one exception for medical media.**

   Different agencies have different formulas for calculating billing if contracts are designed around viewability; some are designed around the IAB 2015 Transaction Principles[4] while others are not. This causes publishers to have to develop different processes for calculating billable amounts & delivering contracted impressions, and most of this work is manual. This adds greatly to the cost of doing business and, ultimately, pushes prices upward for all advertisers. This is why IAB developed its 2015 Transaction Principles with the expectation that the vast majority of advertisers and publishers would adhere to this common standard.

   AMM endorses the current IAB standards in their entirety with one exception: The IAB standard says that that under-delivery should be reconciled in the form of make-good impressions. However, make-goods are often not practical for medical media publishers or advertisers, leaving billing adjustments as the only remaining recourse. In short, impressions falling short of the current IAB threshold may, in some cases, need to be reconciled through billing, rather than through make-goods.

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[4] IAB 2015 Transaction Principles. http://www.iab.com/guidelines/state-of-viewability-transaction-2015. Accessed 2/23/16.

AMM further endorses the IAB standard that says, "Non-measureable impressions should be billed based on the served impression number. Non-measurable are assumed to be viewable since we cannot determine otherwise. We [the IAB] are explicitly not comfortable with applying viewability levels [to non-measured impressions] that are extrapolated from the measured impressions."[5]

5. **When 3rd party (agency/advertiser) viewability vendor data is being utilized for billing, the 3rd party data can be used as long it's within 10% of the publisher's vendor's data.**

    The IAB Primer for Publishers on Improving Ad Viewability suggests that publishers themselves certify a limited set of trusted vendors for 3rd party billing, and if advertisers choose a vendor outside of the trusted vendor list for billing, then publishers should allow for 3rd Party vendor billing as long as measurement is within a certain tolerance level (usually within 10%).[6]

    Although certifying 3rd party vendors may be impractical for some medical publishers, publishers can still allow for billing through a 3rd Party MRC-accredited vendor[7] as long as the 3rd party measurement is within a 10% tolerance.

    Publishers should have their own viewability measurement tool as a check and balance against agency tools, as well as to help improve viewability on their site. From the IAB Primer: "As a starting point, establish an ongoing data system, either internal or a trusted 3rd party vendor, as the publisher's source of truth (preferred benchmark source) for assessment of viewability measurement and viewability rates, as well as latency on your site(s)."[8]

6. **Viewability as a currency for sponsorships or SOV opportunities must be considered through a different lens than ROS for purposes of billing.**

    Road blocks, SOV, and other sponsorship opportunities are in a different class than run-of-site (ROS) ads because, in this model, the advertiser is buying ownership of the page or site—not a set number of impressions. The objectives are not only to maximize visibility but to limit the visibility of competitive ads. In SOV/Sponsorship campaigns there is no opportunity for publishers to optimize campaigns or over-deliver to meet viewability thresholds. In sponsorships where multiple ads are present (e.g., roadblocks, page takeovers), the Media Ratings Council stipulates that all ads be measured separately, but is silent on what constitutes "viewability" when some ads meet the viewability threshold but others do not.[9] The IAB, too, is silent in its recommendations for this area.

    While viewability can and should be measure of campaign performance subjecting the campaign to cancellation, until such time as the IAB or MRC issues more definitive guidance, viewability should not be factored into billing adjustments the same way it is for ROS campaigns. Nevertheless, because some advertisers and agencies will ask that viewability be factored into billing, publishers who wish to honor these requests will undoubtedly factor any potential viewability requirements into their pricing models.

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[5] IAB State of Viewability Transaction 2015 – Frequently Asked Questions. http://www.iab.com/guidelines/state-of-viewability-frequently-asked-questions. Accessed 2/23/16.

[6] IAB Primer for Publishers on Improving Ad Viewability. http://www.iab.com/insights/viewability-primer-for-publishers/. Accessed 4/15/16.

[7] Digital Metrics, Companies Accredited by MRC. Based on MRC accredited digital properties as of 4/14/16. http://mediaratingcouncil.org/Digital%20Landscape.pdf. Accessed 4/15/16

[8] IAB Primer for Publishers on Improving Ad Viewability. http://www.iab.com/insights/viewability-primer-for-publishers/. Accessed 4/15/16.

[9] MRC Viewable Ad Impression Measurement Guidelines (Desktop) http://mediaratingcouncil.org/081815%20Viewable%20Ad%20Impression%20Guideline_v2.0_Final.pdf (Accessed 4/18/15)