

## **Online Brand Effectiveness Research**

### **Best Practice Guidelines**

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#### **Background**

With mounting investment in the online medium, agencies and advertisers increasingly seek to demonstrate effective return on investment from their advertising expenditure. Growing awareness and more sophisticated approaches to planning and executing online advertising campaigns have meant the demand for advertising effectiveness research is becoming the norm.

This increasing utilisation of online brand effectiveness research (BER) has meant that web site audiences are being exposed to studies more frequently and this can hinder their media experience which is of importance to both publishers and advertisers. It can also impact on the quality of the research results.

The Online Brand Effectiveness Research Best Practice Guidelines have been drawn up by the IAB Research Council to ensure that research requested by media agencies and clients is mutually beneficial and is conducted as effectively as possible. The following aims to outline some of the key aspects for consideration when planning and setting up online advertising effectiveness.

#### **When Should Brand Effectiveness Research Be Conducted?**

The following gives some examples of the most common circumstances under which BER is utilised:

- The overriding objective of the campaign is to drive offline purchases, increase brand awareness and/or change brand perceptions.
- As part of an ongoing brand tracking study.
- When a campaign is of sufficient weight/duration to affect clearly defined brand metrics.

Campaigns usually carry a number of key objectives, for example, signing up for a newsletter, competitions, requesting further information in offline brochure form or booking a test drive. These types of objectives can be measured via click streams or on the destination site's pages; they are not objectives that are measurable via this style of research.

Considerations such as future intention to purchase or trial of a product can be covered in advertising/brand effectiveness work if it is coupled to brand awareness.

#### **Methodology**

There are two main recommended approaches to this type of research, Pre and Post or Control and Exposed testing. It is acknowledged that other solutions are available, for example, offline testing in a mock up situation or using non internet based solutions like CATI, however a live, in situation methodology is preferred.

#### **Pre & Post**

- Research is carried out before and after the campaign is live.
- The difference between pre and post measurement is given as the effect of the campaign.

- This is the most frequently used methodology for measuring sponsorship or campaigns where an element of the activity is not ad served.
- The survey is conducted prior to campaign launch and again after the campaign has reached its end. In some cases a mid campaign 'dip' can be used, this is particularly applicable if a campaign is running over a long time period.
- The differences between the pre and post (or pre, mid and post) are deemed as the impact of the campaign.
- This approach is useful in isolating the online campaign uplift when there has been an ongoing offline campaign and a high baseline of existing awareness.
- The approach is also useful in tracking other forms of advertising, for example, sponsorship or custom microsites where access to allow 'tagging' at the programming level is not available.

### **Test & Control (Exposed and Not Exposed)**

- A cookie is dropped from the creative into the browser of the user exposed to the campaign.
- Respondents are identified as exposed to the campaign (test sample) due to the presence of the cookie and are compared to those not exposed (control).
- Simultaneous collection of exposed and non-exposed responses can allow BER studies to isolate the impact of offline media as both groups have had equal opportunity to be exposed to other media.

Note that methodologies where the user is served the research at the same time as when exposed to the campaign can skew awareness (and possibly message association, depending on the creative) and are not deemed comparable with research for other media.

### **Important Considerations for Agencies and Advertisers:**

- Lead time to set up research should be considered, generally speaking pre and post research requires longer to implement. Agencies should give consideration to research needs early in the planning process. Generally a minimum of 3 weeks notice prior to the commencement of the research needs to be given both to the research agency and all publishers involved. Cross media studies may need a much longer.
- Consent to run the research must be requested of the media owner, before the IO is assigned.
- Publishers may refuse or recommend delaying studies if there are other studies running in the same environment at the same time.
- Response rates for your research – as a general rule of thumb, shorter, more concise questionnaires elicit more completed responses. Evidence suggests that response rates tend to decline after between 15 and 20 questions.
- Media owners may need to approve the content of the survey before it goes live.
- If the research is has a defined target group to track, maximising the amount of targeted inventory will assist in reaching the desired number of people to be surveyed in an efficient manner.
- Survey invitations may be via a link, pop-up/pop-under, jump page/interstitial, layer (over the page). Not all publishers accept all methods – research vendors will liaise with publishers as to which method is acceptable for a BER study.
- Survey code/s must be supplied to the publishers on or before the creative deadline.
- Incentives can be used, but consideration should be given to any potential bias this might cause. They may also serve to attract the 'serial' respondent.
- One way to improve sample quality would be to, where possible, remove respondents who have completed the survey significantly quicker than the expected completion time.
- Research should be conducted over a time period appropriate to the campaign term. Traffic patterns to the site where the research is served should be considered – for example by running research for at least 7 consecutive days the possibility of not recruiting any "weekend" only respondents is avoided.
- The survey invitation needs to include details of who is running the research and why and give an assurance of anonymity for the respondent.
- The survey should be user-friendly, quick to load and error free.
- Research should be placed in the environments where the campaign ran or where the media owner can prove the same audience visits an alternative environment to reach an adequate sample of respondents exposed to the campaign.

- It is recommended that a minimum of 2 million impressions are needed to effectively run a BER. Campaigns with a high numbers of sites included or complicated research design may need significantly more impressions allocated.
- Impressions to target the control group are sometimes bonused however this is at the discretion of the individual publishers and must be negotiated and included on the campaign IO.
- Media owners can advise on which invite approach works best within their domain, i.e. pop-up, banner, text link etc.. This must be discussed with the publisher when the campaign is booked.
- It is recommended that appropriate weightings be applied to the recruited samples.
- Steps should be taken to ensure users are only invited to participate in a survey once.
- Research should be AMSRS compliant in approach to their code of practice and adhere to their cookie and data protection regulations.
- BER studies are for research purposes only and not to be used for database generation.

### **Information Sharing**

- Sharing of research findings and data ownership should be negotiated between the media owner and the agency/advertiser at the project outset. Efforts will be taken to ensure confidentiality of sensitive information, for example, percentage uplifts will be used rather than actual awareness levels.
- Media agencies should be aware that media owners are now subjected to a high volume of research requests and face serious issues of over-burdening site users with questionnaires.

This Code of Practice is endorsed by members of the IAB Research Council including representatives of CBS Interactive, Fairfax Digital, News Digital Media, ninemsn, realestate.com.au, Telstra BigPond, Yahoo7.

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