

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt, is holding a white rectangular card in front of his face. The card has a single hole cut out, through which his right eye is visible. The background is a dark, textured wall. A semi-transparent teal banner is overlaid at the bottom of the image, containing the title and subtitle.

The value of being seen

A Guide to Digital Advertising Viewability

A Closer Look at Viewability

Digital advertisers have long held that they shouldn't pay for ads no one actually sees. Viewability is the new industry standard for measuring that. This issue of Smart Market takes a look at what viewability actually is, how it works, and the smartest strategies for putting it to work for you.

- 4** **Viewability from the Top**
Who decides what's viewable?
- 11** **The Smart Marketer's Approach to Viewability**
Balancing viewability and reach
- 14** **Viewability in Action**
What are the real trade-offs of added viewability?
- 18** **The Bottom Line**
Everything in moderation

The MRC definition of viewability:



500%

An ad is viewable if half its pixels are in view for one second if it's a display ad, and two seconds if it's a video.¹

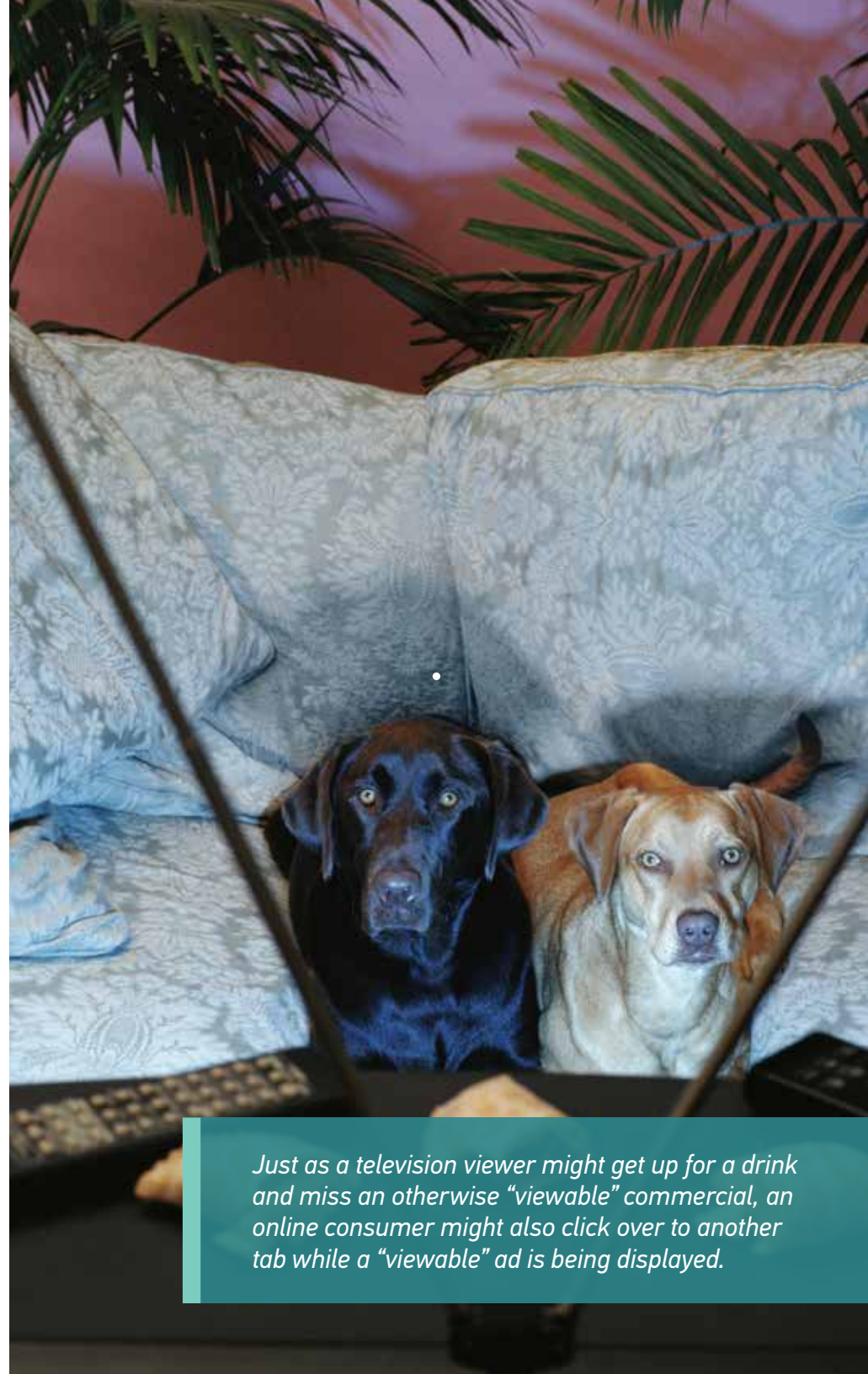
Digital advertising viewability, the metric aimed at tracking only impressions that can actually be seen by users, doesn't seem all that complicated on the face of it. What's hard to understand about advertisers wanting ads to be seen by real live consumers?

Building viewability into your next campaign strategy is another issue entirely. Viewable ads reassure advertisers that their ads are delivered in-view (e.g., on an active page, within frame, etc.) to the end consumer, but they do not guarantee that the consumer actually views the ad creative or message.

In this sense, digital is no different than TV, radio, or billboard advertising.

What's more, a significant segment of video advertising inventory cannot be tracked by any viewability technology, which makes viewability metrics dangerously misleading.

Successful digital advertising depends on a nuanced understanding of what viewability is, when it matters, and how it fits into a broader campaign strategy.



Just as a television viewer might get up for a drink and miss an otherwise “viewable” commercial, an online consumer might also click over to another tab while a “viewable” ad is being displayed.



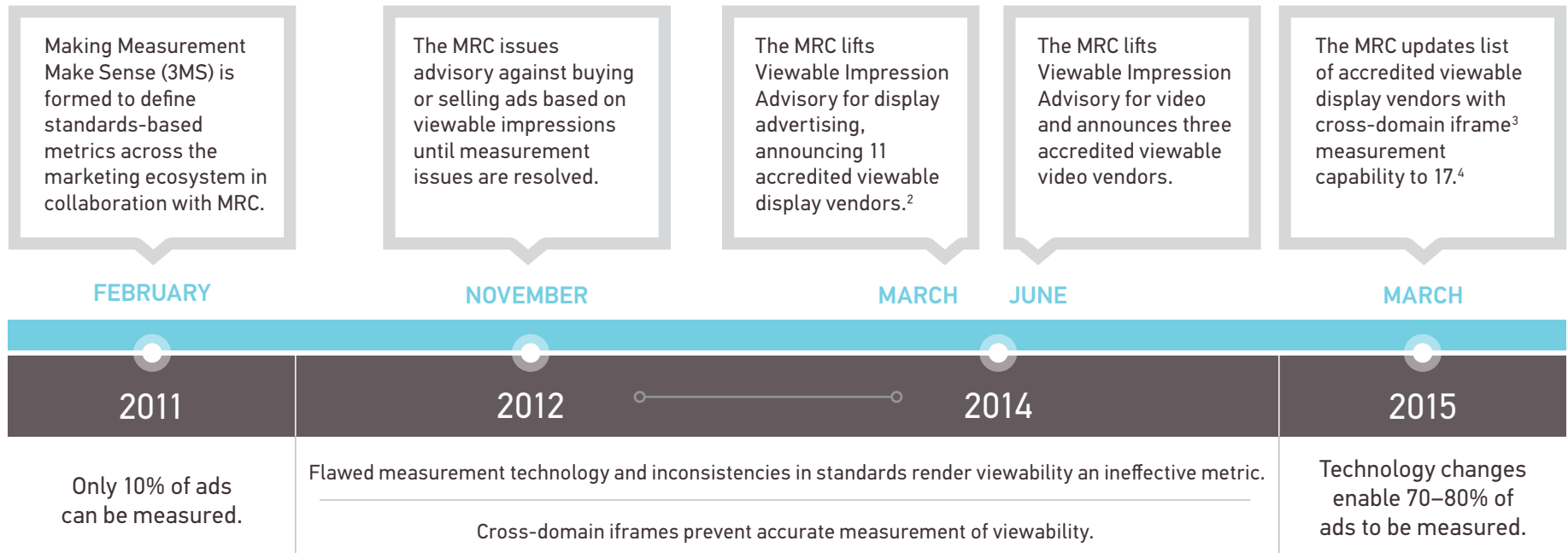
Viewability from the Top

Who decides what's viewable? How do you put viewability to work?

The Viewability Landscape

As digital advertising media budgets grow, pressure to account for those budgets increases as well. Advertisers want to know that the ads they're buying are appearing in front of actual people. But until recently, the industry didn't agree on how to measure viewability and tracking technology was too flawed to achieve consistent standards.

VIEWABILITY EVOLUTION SNAPSHOT



Today, standards for viewability have been established, technology solutions abound, and marketers have embraced viewability metrics enthusiastically. All systems go, right? Not quite. While the industry's measurement standards represent a huge step forward on the path to transparency, the details of exactly how to put this new metric to work are still being hotly debated.

What Makes a Digital Ad Viewable? And Who Gets to Decide?

Three different perspectives



BUYERS

Want 100% viewability, a high bar for most publishers

Don't want to pay for ads that they know won't be seen



SELLERS

Some claim 100% viewability based on proprietary definitions

At risk of losing revenue, as some ads will never be measurable for viewability



TECH PROVIDERS

Establishing their own definitions of a viewable impression

Proprietary measurement methods undermine standardization

Competing interests produce competing definitions of what's "in-view"—leaving marketers waiting for clarity.

Despite advances in technology,
measuring viewability remains challenging.

Thanks to wide variability in browsers, screen sizes, and other aspects of ad delivery, the industry's move toward takeover and other large-format ads in recent years also means that lots of so-called "premium inventory" actually ranks very poorly in terms of viewability.⁵ Video ads bring a separate suite of viewability issues related to VPAID compliance (Video Player Ad-Serving Interface definition, the only video ad delivery standard that allows viewability to be measured), completion rates, and audio muting.

Of course, viewability isn't the only game in town. Today's advertisers have a whole spectrum of brand metrics at their disposal, from attribution and engagement to brand lift. Viewability is just the latest addition to this list, one more way to understand what's working in a campaign, what's not, and why.

V

I E

W A B

I L I T Y

TURN PERSPECTIVE

“Viewability alone doesn’t guarantee consumer engagement.”

To understand engagement, you need to look at more comprehensive measures like lift testing and performance. The non-viewable ads in a campaign will always drag down your results. True lift, then, can be thought of as greater than the observed lift by the approximate ratio of impressions not in view.”

- Maxwell Knight
VP Global Marketing Science Services, Turn

Who Owns Viewability

There are different viewpoints about which industry players are accountable for viewability; that is, who is responsible for making sure ads are seen. Is it the marketer (buyer), agency, the media execution platform, the supply-side platform, or the publisher (seller)?

Turn takes a practical approach here: We do everything in our power to provide our customers only with best-in-class inventory, while holding our inventory providers to the highest possible standards.⁶

Efforts to maintain inventory quality control must be two-pronged: manual and algorithmic.

Turn leverages first- and third-party reporting and insights to understand which properties have a consistently poor quality rating and block them from our inventory pool. We block known bots that can create fraudulent (and therefore non-viewable) impressions and by doing so increase the viewability of the supply we do bid on. And we also support clients who want to purchase only guaranteed viewable inventory by restricting bidding to impressions that meet the MRC standard for viewability and deliver ads only to intended (viewable) media.

Viewability & Ad Effectiveness

An ad's value and ultimate effectiveness cannot rely exclusively on the viewability of its placement. This stands true whether a campaign's key performance indicator (KPI) is high viewability as an end in itself or viewability layered with other campaign metrics.

In some ways, viewability is doing for marketers the same thing attribution modeling did when it released them from the known pitfalls of last-touch attribution. Both viewability and multi-touch attribution (MTA) are emerging measurement frameworks that advertisers can use to better evaluate their campaigns, and they're even more powerful when applied in tandem.

Don't fall victim to putting too much stock in viewability as a standalone metric. Not all publishers measure the viewability of their inventory, and yet a marketer's desired audience might still be drawn to those unmeasurable sites. For instance, since Google doesn't currently support VPAID ads, all YouTube traffic is not measurable under the viewability industry standard.



Though its ads can't be measured as viewable under the industry standard, YouTube may well deliver the premium content and KPIs that a marketer wants. So the most effective campaign for a given marketer might not achieve 100% viewability.

Marketers are just beginning to understand the impact of applying viewability standards to their campaigns.

Focusing primarily on viewability can reduce your inventory—and your overall marketing reach—quickly. So how do you make sure you're not preventing yourself from meeting other campaign goals in the interest of making sure your ads are viewable? If you're running a brand campaign, for example, you want to cast a wide net so that you'll gain insight into which creative, which sites, and which offers work best and most effectively for you.

For every (viewability) action, there will be a reaction.

Advertisers who demand 100% viewability won't achieve the same reach as those who don't, at least until it's possible to measure viewability across media.

But their smaller, possibly more expensive audience might deliver a higher rate of conversion, resulting in an uptick in performance and ROI. The key is to do everything you can to ensure the most favorable reaction possible.





The Smart Marketer's Approach to Viewability

Viewability is important, but so is reach. How best to balance them both?

When Is a Digital Ad Viewable?

Viewability should always be one part of a broader conversation about a campaign's goals and measurement strategy.

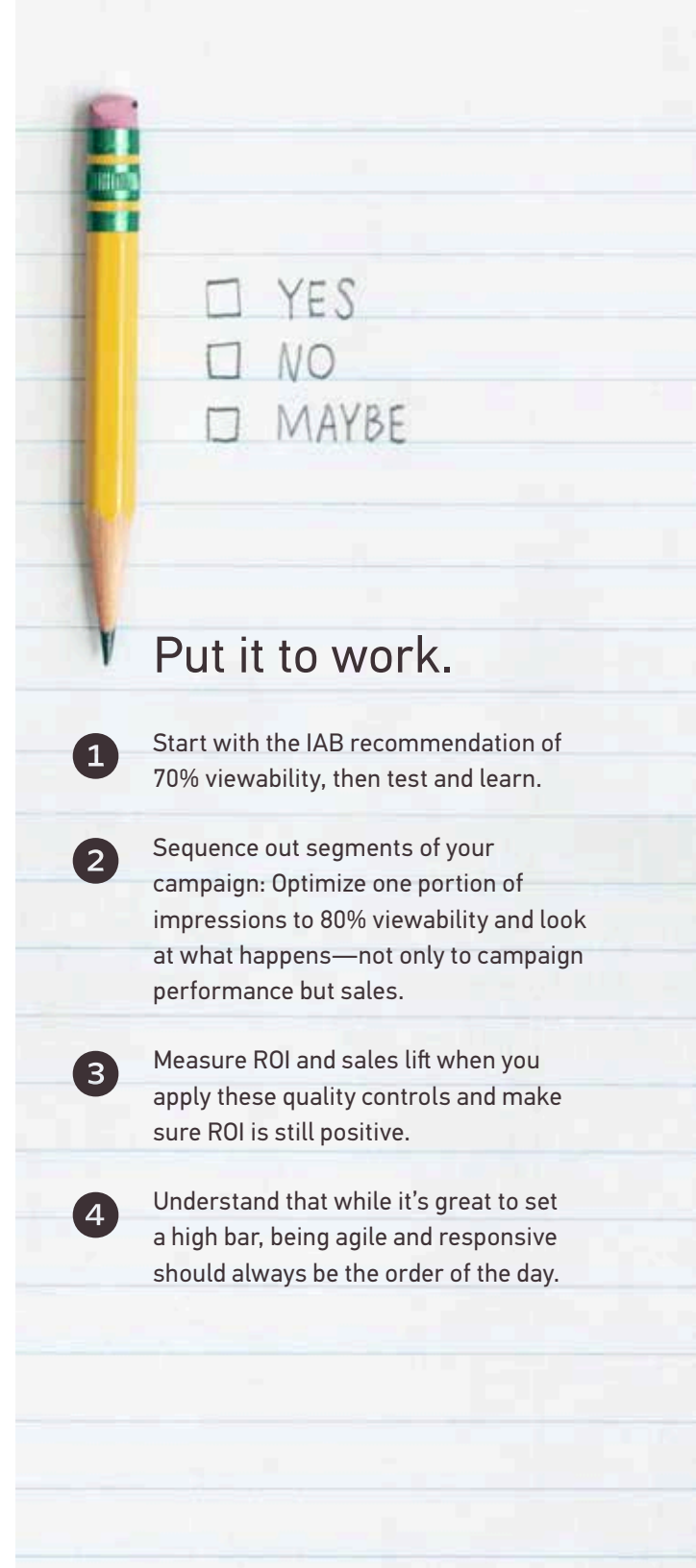
THE IAB'S TRANSACTION PRINCIPLES OFFER A SOLID STARTING POINT.

Given current technology, and the publisher-observed variances in measurement of 30–40%, it is recommended that in this year of transition (2015), measured impressions be held to a 70% viewability threshold.

Agree on a single measurement vendor ahead of time. The industry aspires to variances of no more than 10% between viewability measures provided by different vendors. Avoid costly, error-prone manual processes of reconciling different viewability numbers.

For large-format ads, defined as 242,500 pixels or over, a viewable impression is counted if 30% of the ad pixels are viewable for a minimum of one continuous second.¹ Look at how your exchange defines viewability so you understand how you're being charged.

All transactions between buyers and sellers should use MRC-accredited vendors only.



Put it to work.

- 1 Start with the IAB recommendation of 70% viewability, then test and learn.
- 2 Sequence out segments of your campaign: Optimize one portion of impressions to 80% viewability and look at what happens—not only to campaign performance but sales.
- 3 Measure ROI and sales lift when you apply these quality controls and make sure ROI is still positive.
- 4 Understand that while it's great to set a high bar, being agile and responsive should always be the order of the day.

Optimizing Viewability: Four Tactics

Finding the right level of viewability for your campaign can be tough. Here are four tactics you can deploy in partnership with your DSP to make viewability work for you:

1 Pre-bid filtering:

Establish criteria for site filtering that will get you close to your viewability target. For video, players must be VPAID-enabled for viewability to be measured, so you may wish to rule out non-VPAID inventory. Another consideration may be player size. Larger video players tend to indicate higher-quality inventory, but they can also be few and far between, so limiting your campaign to large players is going to significantly narrow your possible inventory.

2 Real-time reporting:

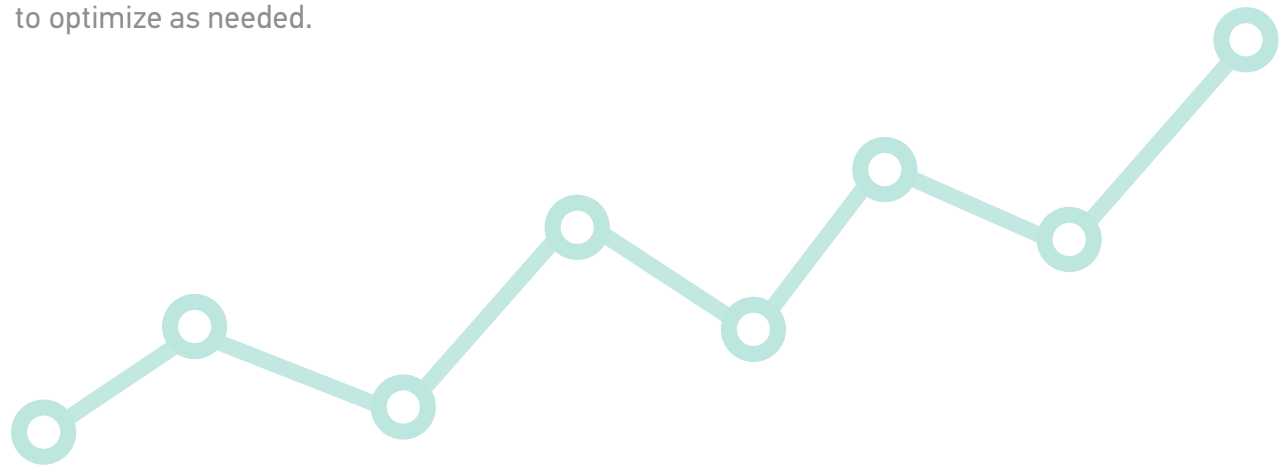
Make sure your viewability data—whether it's actual viewability or a proxy like banner size or player size—gets built into your campaign reports, so that you can look at what works and take steps to optimize as needed.

3 Post-bid optimization:

Once you understand how your campaign's performing, you can create a white list that identifies sites where your ads are performing well and a black list where you're seeing ads that underperform.

4 Private marketplaces:

Work with publishers that offer private marketplaces that can deliver higher viewability and the audience you seek.





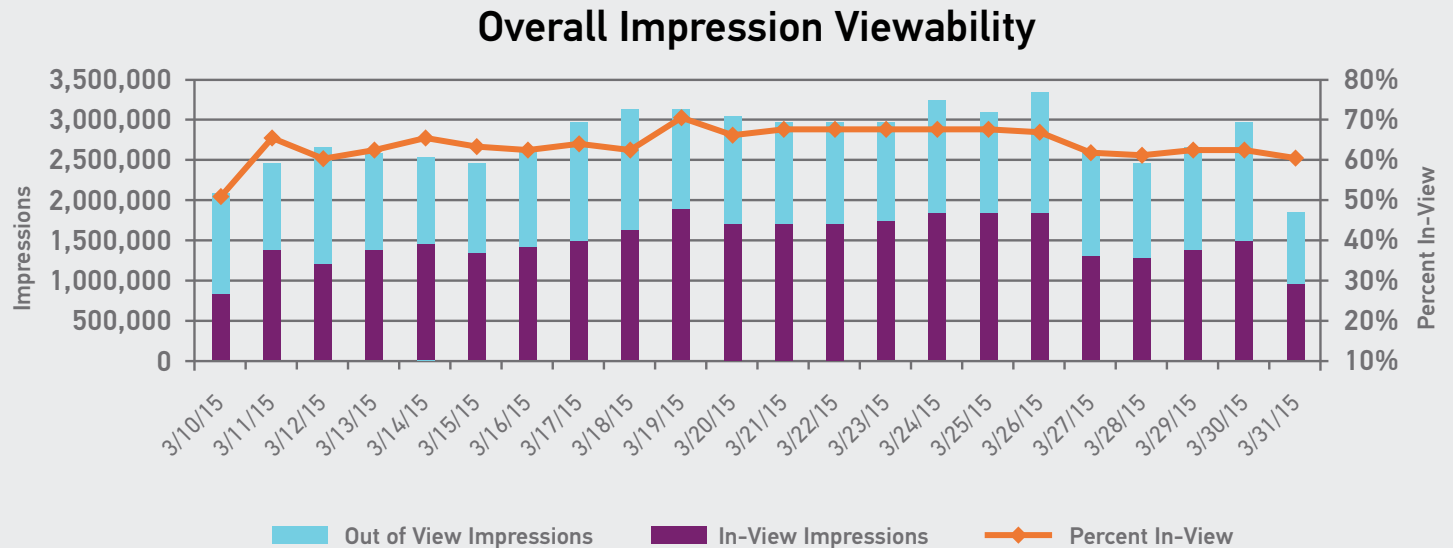
Viewability in Action

What are the real trade-offs of added viewability?

Viewability in Action

It's going to take a lot of trial and error to realize the full implications of adding viewability as a requirement of inventory: Any targeting or filtering you apply will have some trickle-down effect.

Here's a look at how viewability measured up across millions of impressions purchased by an advertiser.



Campaign reports such as this Overall Impression Viewability chart provide clarity on how your campaign is performing in terms of percent in-view. But remember: This report leaves much to interpret.

Some things to consider: Is my viewability filter affecting performance? Is it keeping me off sites that have worked for me in the past? Do I understand how my vendor has calibrated my results? Will this campaign deliver the audience insight I need?

What Should You Do About Viewability?

If you're an advertiser and want your campaigns to have the biggest possible impact, you face a serious dilemma.

You can't make viewability your only priority, because not all ads are measurable and you'd risk limiting the scope and reach of your campaigns. You also can't ignore viewability because you need your ads to be seen. The question you need to be asking is: How much do my choices about viewability optimization influence the other metrics of my campaign?

WORKSHEET

Striking the right balance between viewability and reach can take some fine-tuning. In this example, we've compared campaign results based on the mean viewability rate of 40%, resulting in a \$3.75 vCPM, whereas a mean viewability of 60% produced a \$3.33 vCPM.

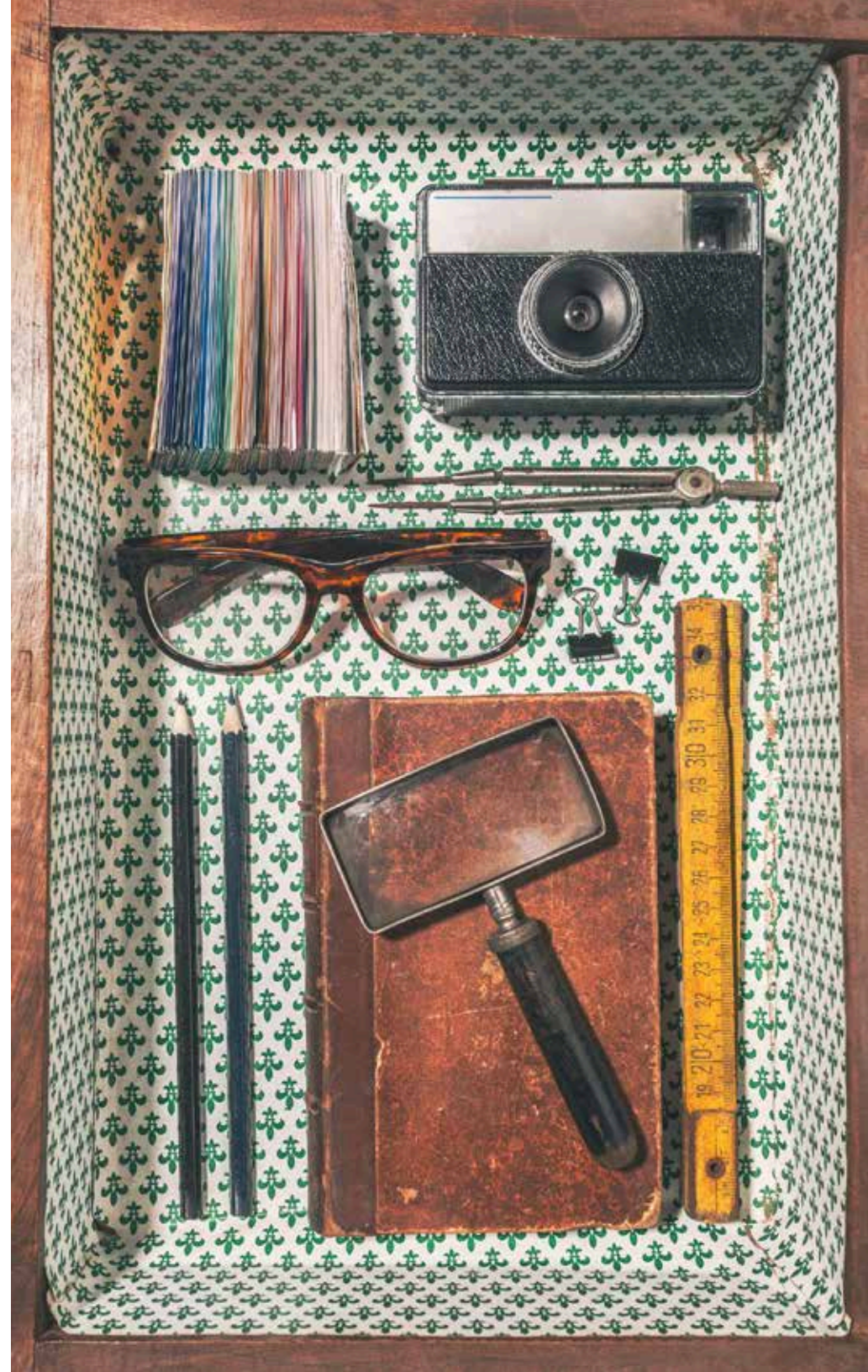
Example Campaign	RTB Mean Viewability	Mean Price (CPM or eCPM)	Daily Spend	Daily Imps Delivered	Daily Viewable Imps Delivered	Viewable CPM (vCPM)
Variable	A	B	C	D	E	F
Calculation	-	-	-	$D = C/B * 1000$	$E = A * D$	$(C/E) * 1000$
Original Media Buy	40%	\$1.50	\$10,000	6,666,666	2,666,666	\$3.75
Optimized for Viewability	60%	\$2.00	\$5,000	2,500,000	1,500,000	\$3.33
Your Campaign						
Media Buy	40%					
Optimized for Viewability	60%					

What this example shows is a greater percentage of in-view placements makes the campaign more efficient in terms of spend, but as a result it doesn't reach as many people. Applying higher standards of viewability has traded reach for efficiency. Determining viewability success will depend on your unique campaign goals. Use the worksheet here to support your testing strategy.

Are you measuring the impact of viewability efforts on your marketing? Ask yourself these questions:

- What's my vCPM (don't forget to include your ad serving fees, even on ads that aren't viewable)?
- How does shifting my vCPM affect my achievable level of viewable impressions? What's the trade-off between reach and viewable efficiency?
- What's my real lift once I account for the "drag" that non-viewable impressions had on my treatment group (if you are, in fact, measuring lift)?

Remember to measure the overall impact of your viewability efforts on your marketing, so you won't be stuck with unspent budget and unmet targets.





The Bottom Line

Everything in moderation

The Bottom Line

Whatever your approach to viewability, the important thing is to keep an open mind, and be ready to evolve with the industry.

Keep having transparent conversations with your agency and technology partners. Stay on top of best practices. Most important, make sure your approach to viewability supports, rather than hinders, the success of your marketing. Use every brand metric you can to measure your effectiveness. Make sure you're making all of them work, and not leaning too hard on viewability. Viewability should never be an end in itself. It should be a way of optimizing your marketing to support your ultimate business objective, whether you're in it for the clicks, leads, or sales.

Viewability at a Glance

Viewability, an online ad's ability to be seen, and the shift from served to viewable impressions continue to move the industry toward greater accountability.

Guaranteeing the 'opportunity to see' lays the groundwork for comparability across media types, paving the way for cross-media measurement.

MRC defines a viewable ad as follows:¹

- Display ads—50% of pixels in view for one continuous second
- Video ads—50% of pixels in view for two continuous seconds
- Large display ads (242,500 pixels or more)—30% of pixels in view for one continuous second

Current technology limitations prevent the measurement of all served impressions. Given the margin of error, the MRC/IAB advise advertisers to expect 70% viewability as a reasonable threshold for most campaigns.

When factoring viewability into your campaign, it's important to agree on a single accredited viewability measurement vendor ahead of time—MRC has accredited 17 display vendors and 7 video vendors.⁷

Viewability is just one of many metrics at your disposal—as you begin to apply viewability standards, be cautious not to put too much stock in viewability as a standalone metric.

About Turn

Turn delivers real-time insights that transform the way leading media agencies and enterprises make marketing decisions. Our Digital Hub for Marketers enables anonymous audience planning, data centralization, cross-device advertising, and advanced analytics, along with point-and-click access to more than 150 integrated technology partners. Turn is headquartered in Silicon Valley and provides its products and services worldwide.

Visit www.turn.com



@turnplatform



Turn



Turn Inc.

Sources:

- 1 Media Rating Council. (2014, June 30). MRC Viewable Ad Impression Measurement Guidelines. Retrieved from http://www.mediaratingcouncil.org/063014%20Viewable%20Ad%20Impression%20Guideline_Final.pdf
- 2 Aquino, J. (2014, March 31). MRC Gives Its Blessing To Viewability Vendors. Retrieved from <http://adexchanger.com/online-advertising/mrc-gives-its-blessing-to-viewability-vendors/>
- 3 A cross-domain inline frame (or iframe) enables content from one web page to be displayed within another, separately hosted and loaded page.
- 4 Media Rating Council. (2015, March 2). MRC Accredited Viewable Display Impression and/or Ad Verification Vendors: Enhanced Description. Retrieved from http://mediaratingcouncil.org/030215_AdVerification%20disclosures%20PostReconciliation.pdf
- 5 Shields, M. (2015, January 27). The Push For Web Ad Viewability Proving To Be Nightmare For Publishers Early On. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.wsj.com/cmo/2015/01/27/the-push-for-web-ad-viewability-proving-to-be-nightmare-for-publishers-early-on/>
- 6 Turn Privacy Guidelines. (2015, April 3). Retrieved from www.turn.com/trust/inventory-guidelines.
- 7 Media Rating Council. (2015, March 16). Digital Metrics, Companies Accredited by MRC. Retrieved from <http://mediaratingcouncil.org/Digital%20Landscape.pdf>

© 2015 Turn Inc. All rights reserved. Turn is a registered trademark of Turn Inc. All services are subject to change or discontinuation without notice. April 2015.

For more information:

Americas

Quynh Cline
quynh.cline@turn.com
+1.650.362.6891

Europe

Helen Miall
helen.miall@turn.com
+44.20.7255.5665

Asia-Pacific

Rita Vannithone
rita.vannithone@turn.com
+852.6087.4576

For press inquiries:

Leslie Lee
leslie.lee@turn.com
+1.646.213.9734