IMPRESSION

A Guide to Media Effectiveness Measurement in 2025

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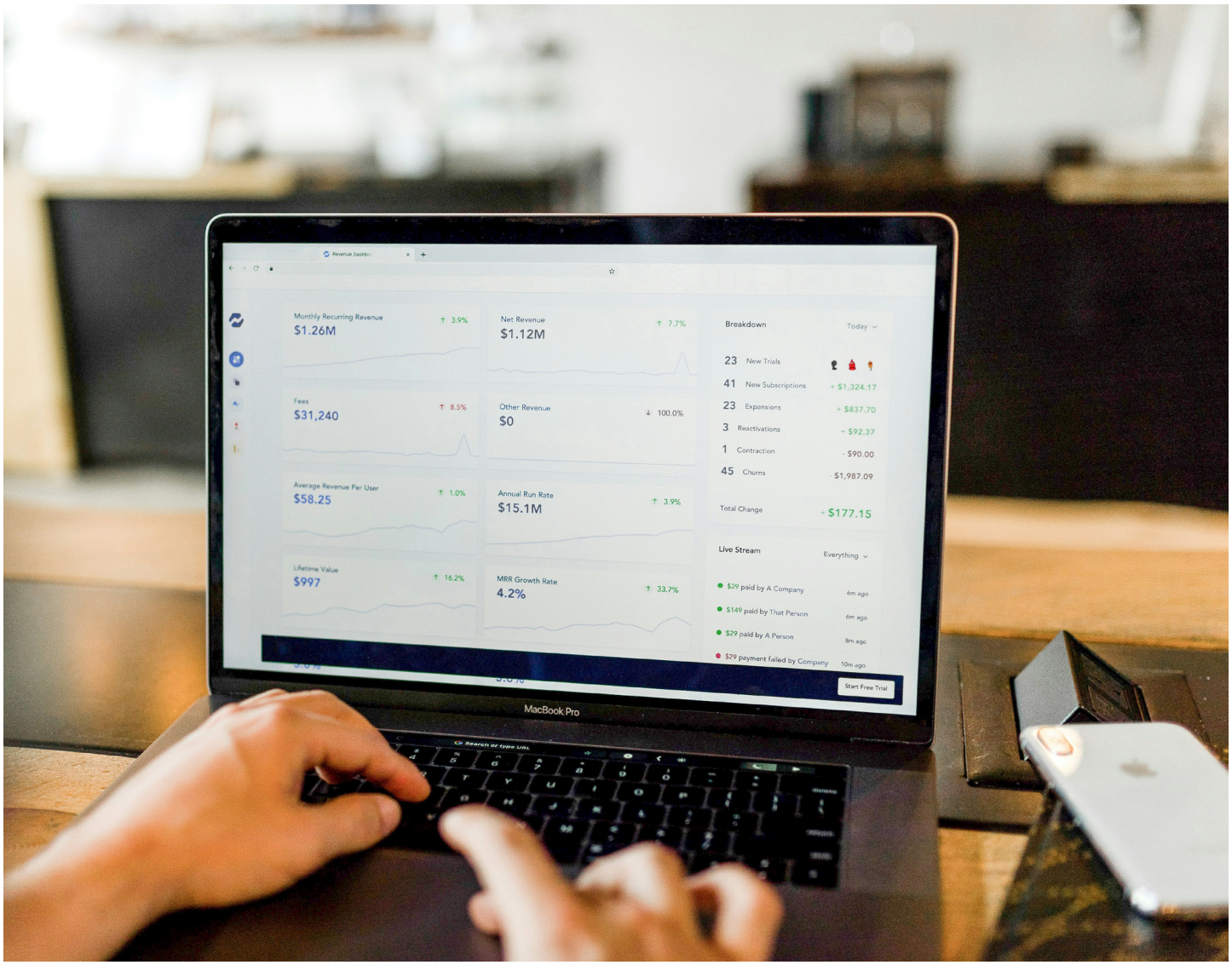
Introduction

Over-reliance on digital attribution has been a growing concern of marketing measurement and effectiveness experts for some time.

This type of digital attribution, using only ad clicks or views for attributing sales is now more flawed than it ever has been. Brands of all sizes have famously over-invested in performance marketing at the expense of brand-led, above-the-line advertising on mediums which are comparatively more difficult to track, or have a longer lag associated with the resulting sales.

As marketers, we need to work harder and smarter to better understand the true impact of our marketing efforts, including the impacts and synergies between channels. This is, of course, easier said than done.



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The current landscape of media measurement

Optimising marketing resources and budget allocation is more important than ever.

Given the economic landscape, CEOs and CFOs are demanding better confidence in their returns on marketing investments. Brands and platforms are currently challenged in many ways by the changing technology capabilities, limited by legal changes driven by rising consumer awareness of the capabilities of digital tracking. As a result, this year is set to see additional challenges in reporting on performance marketing efforts, prompting the need for more sophisticated approaches to attribution and measurement across the board.

Broadly speaking, the challenges fall into two categories;

- → technology changes based on privacy legislation, and
- → challenges that have always existed around digital attribution including the impact of multiple device usage and offline advertising exposures.

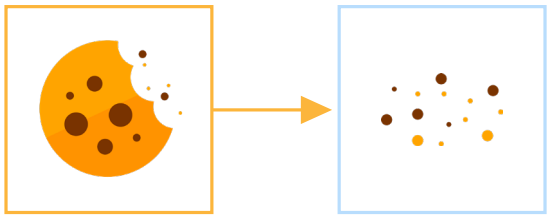
TECHNOLOGY CHANGES

Privacy regulations which are impacting the efficacy of digital attribution at a device level are being applied relatively evenly across web browsers and mobile devices. On browsers across all devices, cookies are the available toolset for identifying the same user on the same device across sessions. On mobile devices inside apps, developers and marketers have for some time had access to a device-level ID. Both technologies can be used in similar ways to tie together sessions into the notion of a singular consumer. Now, the efficacy of cookies, and access to device IDs is being restricted.

The loss of browser cookie identifiers

Since at least 2017, the power of third-party cookies has slowly been eroding, with browsers such as Safari, Brave and Firefox being some of the first browsers to implement their approaches to 'tracking prevention' technologies. Since then, these technologies have extended to begin to block both analytics data and the duration some browser cookies can remain on a device. Third-party cookies are so-called because they are typically operated by ad and analytics platforms rather than the website itself - and therefore are a 'third party' participating when you're browsing a website.

Starting in January 2024, Google Chrome joined this already long list of browsers and began restricting third-party cookies. Known as Tracking Protection, this new feature follows Google's plans of completely removing third-party cookie tracking, announced back in 2020. Side note: This has been continually pushed back due to concerns around antitrust competition rules -- even now at the time of writing this in February 2024, this is under discussion again with the UK Competitions and Markets Authority. Whilst Google Chrome is just one browser, as of 2023 Chrome makes up over 64% of the total global browser market share.



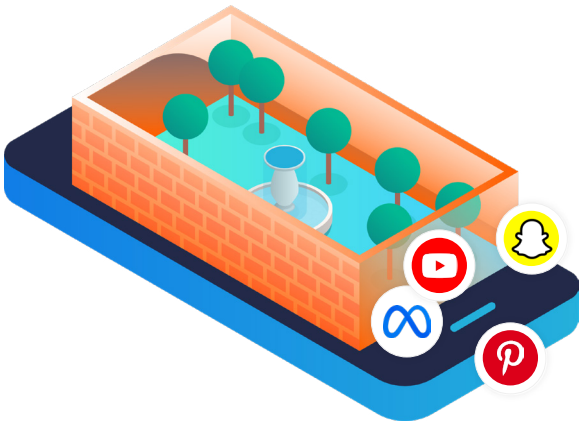
The loss of mobile app device identifiers

It's not just Google and other browser vendors in the firing line. Mobile device IDs were previously also available to ad tech platforms to tie together app sessions into singular users and to attribute advertising conversion actions such as app installations for related advertising campaigns. The problem here is that with a permanent ID, information on the consumers' preferences can be built up by these third parties, and even tied to first-party personal identifiers.

You may recall in the last few years the increase in the rise of mobile apps asking for tracking permissions - this is so that the app developer has access to the Apple Identifier for Advertisers "IDFA" or Google Advertising ID "AAID" for such purposes.

These concerns around data stitching are particularly pertinent for social platform owners, such as Meta. Each of these organisations has and can incrementally build a wealth of information on each consumer. It's this the privacy-led legislation hopes to disrupt.

As a consequence, a few challenges have emerged: device-level information such as IDs aren't as readily available to app developers and marketers, and apps which do allow external linking may open in embedded "signed-out" browsers. Companies with identity graphs as large as Meta's (Facebook, Instagram) and Microsoft's (LinkedIn) typically discourage and under-reward user-generated content with external links too - as they want to keep you inside the platform ecosystem. All of these tactics, among others, have led to these environments becoming known as 'walled gardens'.



Walled Gardens: Keeping users, advertising, tracking and revenue inside

Nothing exists in a vacuum in technology. Beyond these changes, there are also additional requirements being put onto data "gatekeeper" organisations such as Meta, Google, Microsoft and more relating to them only being able to consume consented personal data, such as in some cases website analytics information. This is due to the Digital Markets Act which comes into force in March 2024.

MULTI-DEVICE AND OFFLINE ADVERTISING EXPOSURE

All of this multi-touch attribution only shows incomplete data - as it always has done. Digital attribution should not be substituted for marketing attribution, but it sometimes is. This is particularly true in smaller businesses where this is less of an issue as performance marketing may well be the majority of marketing spend, however as a business grows, digital attribution should only be one of many sources of insights.

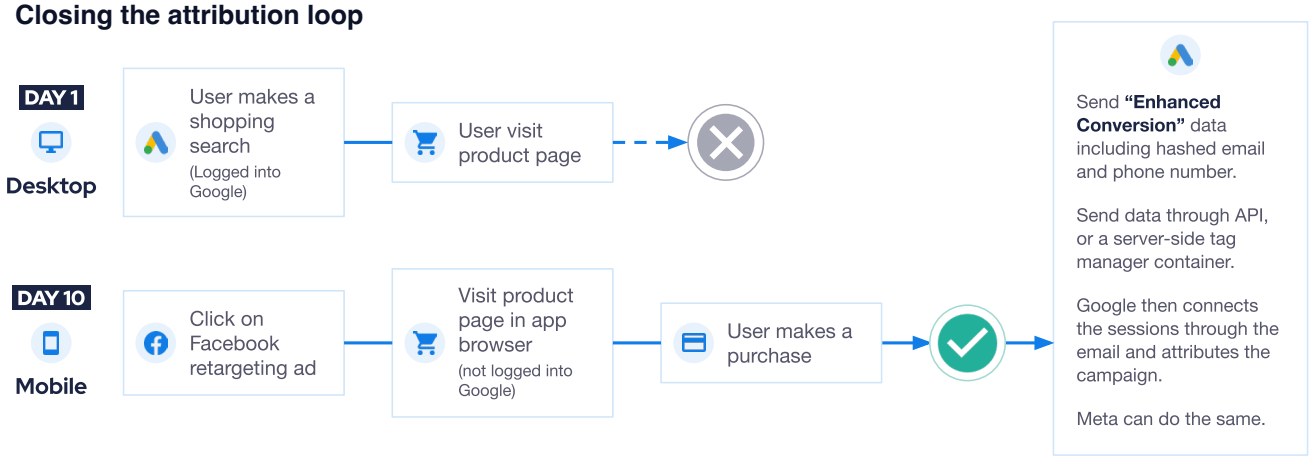
Multi-touch attribution needs precisely that to work: multiple touches. Consumers now typically use both mobile, laptop and even other smart home devices to conduct phases of their buying journeys, particularly research which is where top-of-funnel advertising comes into play, multi-touch advertising needs to be aware of this to stitch together multiple sessions to form a longer-term view. With the technology limitations as described above, plus the other obvious challenges around being able to tie together every ad exposure on every device to each individual, you can see the obvious limitations in this need.

Additionally, digital multi-touch attribution is a measurement technique that takes into account only digital exposures, usually at the session or user level. It does not take into account digital channels that are not tagged properly, or digital advertising which isn't targeted at an individual user, for example, digital out-of-home screens. Multi-touch attribution also can't be aware of other aggregated marketing efforts such as offline advertising, sponsorships, print and TV, among others. You may also be able to spot the over-attribution in your own business by looking at the sum of platform conversion values versus your revenue.

Across all of these challenges caused by different exposures across different mediums and different devices, it's brand-led above-the-line advertising which suffers in multi-touch attribution. Brands need top-of-funnel advertising to grow, so there's an obvious issue here which calls for more sophistication in how all marketing activity is measured holistically.

To tackle the challenges outlined here, agile marketers are embracing broader techniques for measuring **Media Effectiveness** to improve their media buying and unlock growth. These methods combine modelling and testing, which are privacy-safe alternatives to digital attribution and offer a different lens on holistic marketing performance. These techniques when combined provide the most reliable and trustworthy approach to marketing measurement - in fact, testing and modelling when used together have been dubbed the '**gold standard**' of measurement in data-constrained environments by the Harvard Business Review.

Closing the attribution loop



A cross device and cross platform Google Ads example

The evolution of media effectiveness measurement

We're seeing a hugely increased interest and demand in the need for advertising effectiveness measurement at the moment.

We expect investment in this area to grow as brands need more evidence and a single source of truth when it comes to making advertising investment decisions. With technology challenges such as 'black-box' algorithms, recent privacy legislation such as the Digital Markets Act, and the decline of third-party data, media effectiveness measurement and its techniques offer marketers a practical framework for optimising their media investments.

The latest techniques to measure your media effectiveness aren't all new. Some, such as econometric models or media mix modelling, are having a resurgence, whereas others are utilising a little more modelled data to connect the dots and close the loop on attribution, as we outline in this section.

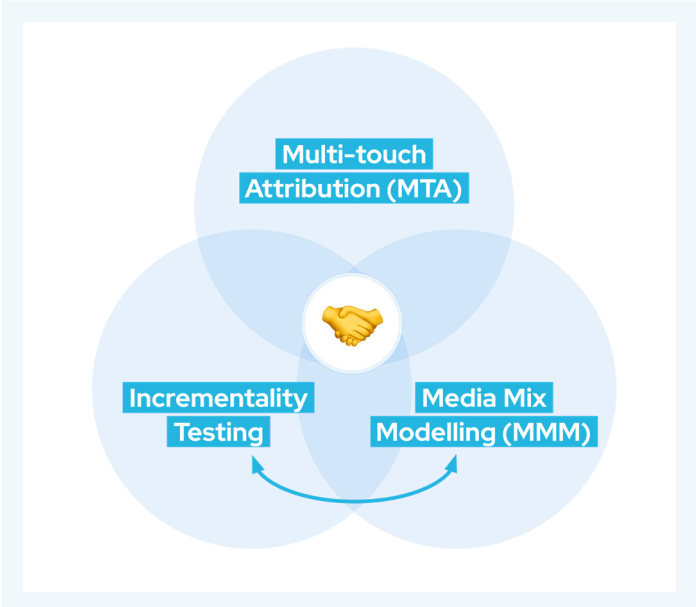
It is important to state that no type of media measurement is a replacement for a marketing strategy, as all measurement is retrospective in nature. It is looking back on previous performance data from your campaigns, assuming that, without calibration, the past relationships between investments and KPIs will continue as-is in the future. There is also unfortunately no foresight in historical data to look at what might have happened if an entirely new channel or campaign were to be launched, which is especially likely the case if you want to get a better balance between brand and performance advertising. Adidas and AirBnB have famously spoken about their over-investment into performance marketing, as mature businesses in the past. We know, long-term advertising drives short-term sales and long-term brand awareness, but it doesn't work the other way around.

An effective marketing strategy is therefore required to take on board all of these disparate insights to steer major investment decisions. The place of great measurement sits within this to provide such insights, so they can be used to drive greater results from your strategy over time.

The trio of attribution and contribution

When it comes to attributing the value of your digital media in 2024, there are a lot of options out there and no doubt you've heard at least a little about a few of the options already.

You may have heard that multi-touch attribution is 'dead'. The truth of the matter is that digital attribution is still used daily in all digital media buys and for cross-campaign comparison of results, so despite the obvious challenges to the methodology as we've laid them out here, managing your data for such models is still important. There are a few tools out there that claim to improve these through AI, but these may not be nuanced enough, as outlined in WARC.



POWERING MULTI-TOUCH ATTRIBUTION WITH MORE, BETTER DATA

Privacy and consent are big topics driving the changes we're seeing, so it is necessary to start there. Digital attribution without cookies does still require data; anonymised pings and as much consented, permissed first-party data as is reasonable, to join the dots from initial advertising exposure through to sale or conversion. To enable these anonymised analytics and ads 'pings', there's a variety of ways ad vendors have supported an industry initiative called the Transparency and Consent Framework. Google's version of this you may have heard about is called **Consent Mode**.

Capturing consent, capturing more first-party data, and then putting this consented data to work is now a huge topic in every business, and for good reason. Not only can such data be used inside your customer data platform ("CDP") or CRM for activations like email marketing, it can also crucially be used in ads platforms for building audiences and closing the loop on attribution where the initial "conversion" data might not have been reported on.

Closing this attribution loop is the central theme for a lot of marketing technology at the moment as vendors want to ensure the reported effectiveness of digital advertising remains high. There are a number of pieces of technical solutions your business should consider adopting, where suitable, such as:

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MARTECH

Ensure compliant data capture, close the conversion loop and enable value-based bidding in this data constrained environment.

- ☐ **Consent Management Platform.** Make the most of your potential data collection post the March EU consent capture deadline. Google's Consent Mode v2 (among others) to allow you to send anonymous 'signals' instead of nothing at all for non-consenting marketing website users.
- ☐ **Server-Side Tagging.** Remove some of the heavy lifting from your clients browsers; avoid some automated browser tracking blocking; enhance or redact event and conversion data sent to ad tech platforms; centralise back end event logic across web, app, and internal systems. (e.g. subscriptions and product returns)
- ☐ **Enhanced Conversions.** Capture additional personal information, with consent, and report back to ad platforms to close the attribution loop when click based identifiers aren't available or were placed on the consumers' other research device.
- ☐ **Conversion Import.** For repeating purchases, or those with a time-lag, capture and report back the click IDs from ad platforms to join the dots when the sale is made later. Particularly valuable for recurring B2C and all B2B CRM businesses.
- ☐ **Mobile Measurement Platform.** Not for everyone, but if you're running app install campaigns and need to track this effectively, consider using a measurement platform which handles all the appropriate cross-platform tracking and ads platform API event reporting for you.
- ☐ **Customer Data Platform.** Unify all customer communications and actions in a singular customer view. Track and model lifetime value, recency and frequency. Segment customers and use these first party audiences across marketing communications, advertising and more.

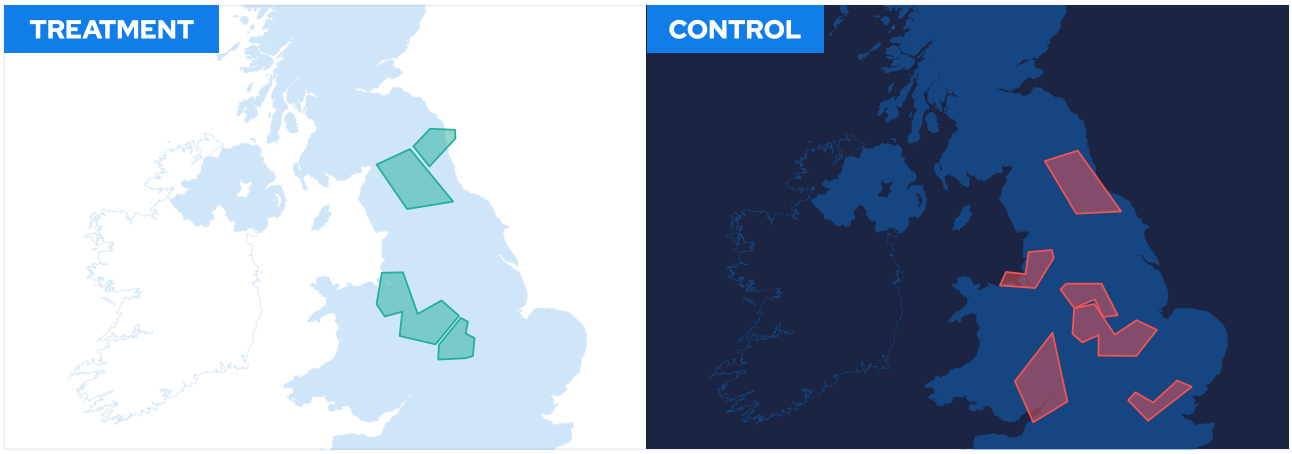
PROVE THE VALUE OF YOUR MEDIA INVESTMENTS THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation in media, such as Incrementality Testing is a statistical analysis method used to measure and estimate the direct impact, cumulative impact, and short term effects of a campaign or particular media channel.

It aims to establish a causal relationship by comparing a "treatment" with a "control" group. The treatment group refers to a group exposed to a marketing experiment and the control group refers to a group that hasn't been exposed. It could be that an audience is exposed to different creatives, channels or tactics or that there's a hold-out or significant over-saturation in the area. Incrementality Testing provides ways to quantify direct media impact using data, and the separation of confounding variables.

One challenge within incrementality testing is accounting for individual differences and other confounding variables. Confounding variables refer to additional factors that are correlated with both the independent and dependent variables, making it difficult to determine the true relationship between them. To tackle this, most analysts would use a synthetic control group for comparison. Popularised by increased capability, enhanced simulation algorithms and processing power, implementing a synthetic control limits the challenges faced in market matching. The use of a synthetic control is essential for isolating the causal impact of a marketing intervention from other confounding factors. By constructing a synthetic control group that closely resembles the treated group's characteristics before the intervention, we can effectively estimate the counterfactual scenario in the absence of the marketing intervention. This approach enables rigorous estimation of the true incremental effects of marketing activities, helping marketers make informed decisions about resource allocation and channel performance.

Incrementality Testing in particular is quickly growing in popularity at the moment as digital ad platform metrics are becoming increasingly modelled, and marketers want harder facts on which to make investment decisions.



Treatment and control locations were used to generate the treatment and artificial control groups.

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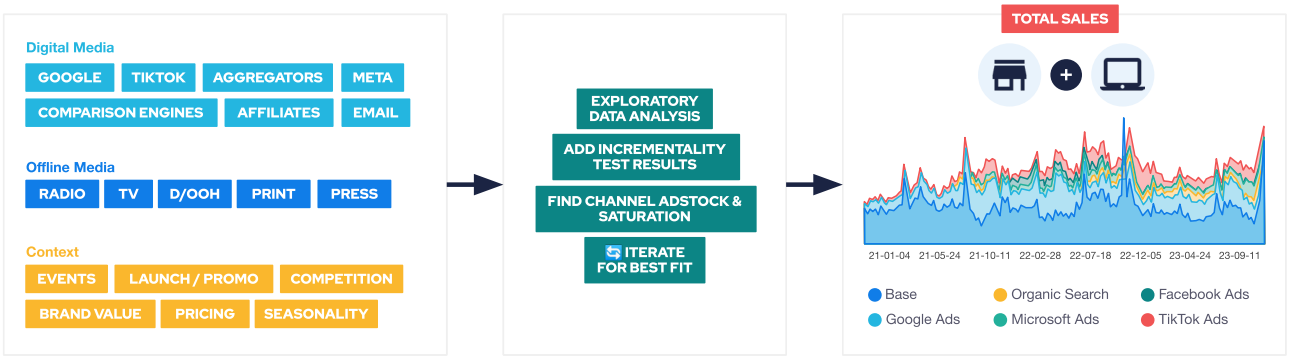
MODEL CHANNEL MEDIA CONTRIBUTIONS OVER THE LONG TERM WITH MEDIA MIX MODELS

Originating in the 1950s within the retail sector, econometric modelling, such as media mix modeling gained widespread popularity during the 1960s and 1970s in larger businesses investing in a multitude of advertising campaigns, to understand the cause and effect of their sales performance. It's a measure of all inputs and a wide range of outputs that matter and statisticians can build bespoke models which break down the most likely contribution each advertising channel and factor is making to the overall revenue. Simply put, It works by analysing historical data on various media channels and their impact on KPIs whilst taking into account sometimes delayed effects.

In comparison to other attribution models, MMM takes a broad view of campaign performance, utilising macro, aggregated data sets to provide a periodic analysis over a medium to long-term timeframe. Modern media mix modelling also takes into account several transformations on the data, such as the adstock (carry-over) effect advertising can have, as well as the saturation (diminishing returns) effect over-investment into any singular channel can have on effectiveness.

Advanced media mix models also account for these variables changing over time, to showcase effects such as growing brand awareness and advertising fatigue.



The media mix modelling data process

Most importantly, because of the coarse granularity of the data that econometric modelling operates on, this means the analysis can be done without the use of web browser cookies, and without requiring individually identifiable personal information. Due to the nature of the data being analysed, and the methods in use, this does mean analyses typically require around 3 years of data to run. This is because the model will struggle to truly capture the effects of seasonality with limited data. The data must be of good quality as complete or consistent data can reduce the certainty of the results. The same can be said for the amount of variance in the inputs of the 'signals' into the modelling - for example, channels with entirely consistent spending are difficult to pair with business outcomes as there are no peaks or troughs in exposure to tie back to peaks or troughs in outcomes.

Incrementality tests can improve media mix models

Incrementality studies can also be used to inform Media Mix Modelling by providing useful insights into the incremental impact of how a particular media channel contributes to KPIs in comparison to a scenario with no marketing activity. At Impression, we use a **Bayesian approach** in our statistics. This means in addition to 'letting the data do the talking', we can also utilise the outcomes from recent incrementality studies and experiments to ensure the model fits facts we know to be true.

Additionally, this approach enables you to fine-tune to what extent prior knowledge influences results, therefore if there is a lot of prior uncertainty around a particular media channel, you can incorporate this lack of confidence into the model. Once any prior knowledge has been integrated into the model, the data is then used to update this knowledge to provide useful insights derived from both a combination of the data and prior knowledge.

Once a **media mix model** is fitted, you can use this model to predict future KPIs based on either the current or the new optimised budget. You may find that some channels within the MMM have high uncertainty associated with them. To tackle this, it is recommended that an incrementality test be conducted for this channel to measure the causal impact. Once test results are in, the MMM can be calibrated using the methods described above. Over time these predictions can be compared with reality and as a result, your understanding of the data and modelling process can be iteratively improved over time.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

From what we have learnt from above we can piece together an all-in-one proactive approach that involves privacy-safe attribution, measurement and contribution to build real insights. For instance:

1. **MULTI-TOUCH ATTRIBUTION**

   Used **daily** in ads and analytics platforms for **optimisation and reporting**, using the most granular data where available. Add first-party data via data imports and rely on privacy-safer signals & modelling.

2. **INCREMENTALITY TESTING**

   Test new channels and validate existing ones. The test concludes in a short period depending on the requirements of the test. Understand which tactics and **which platforms work**. Understand real business outcomes in revenue terms, **without multiple platforms reporting the same revenue**. Measure online and offline impacts.

3. **MEDIA MIX MODELLING (MMM)**

   Run bespoke models semi-regularly (every **six months** as an example). Understand the medium to long-term benefits of each channel with deduplicated ROAS. You can predict carry-over effects and channel saturations. **Scenario plan new media mixes and new budgets**. Measure **all channels and any business factors affecting performance**.

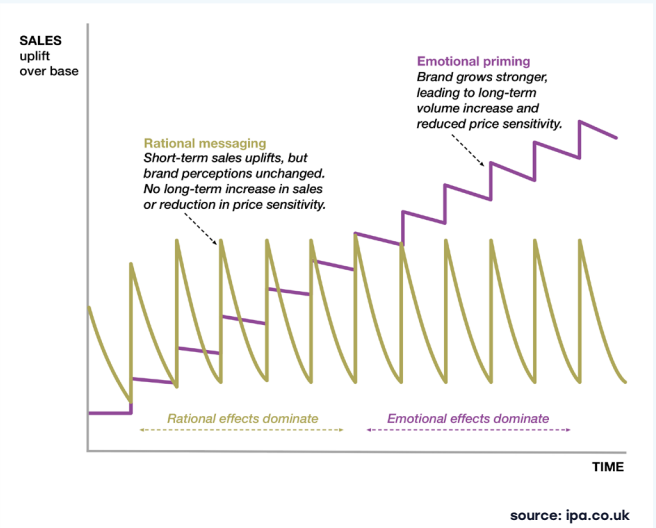
Following this trio of attribution and contribution will build a strong methodology for accurately measuring Media Effectiveness.

Demonstrating the value of brand media vs performance media

You may have noticed that in what we have covered so far, we've looked at daily, weekly and bi-annual approaches to Media Effectiveness measurement, with Multi-touch Attribution, Incrementality Testing, and Media Mix Modelling.

To see how this might translate into informing marketing strategies, we need to look at The Long and Short of It, by Les Binet & Peter Field. Around for over a decade now, this may be a concept you are familiar with, but this marketing approach argues that there are two communication types which impact many buying decisions. These are Rational Messaging – system 2 logical reasoning that requires attention and interest at the time of research, and Emotional Priming – long-lasting system 1 triggers where marketing messages require less attention to absorb and which grow deeper after repeated exposure.

When mapped like in the graph below, you can see over a period of time, Emotional Priming wins over any short-term Rational messages – so get creative, consider wider advertising formats, and consider a long-term brand-building approach.



These can be broken down into brand and performance:

BRAND MEDIA

Has the long-term goal of increasing awareness of your brand, its core values, promises and propositions.

PERFORMANCE MEDIA

Looks at harvesting demand in the market by focusing on short to medium-term conversion activity, seeing the direct return on investment.

Focusing on both is key to long-term profitability, and measuring the effectiveness and outcomes of emotional, including brand-led campaign investments, can help you find the right balance between long and short investments.

Final thoughts

Media effectiveness measurement plays a crucial role in optimising marketing strategies by assessing the impact of various media channels on achieving KPIs and ensuring efficient resource allocation.

Incrementality testing isolates the impact of a specific marketing effort, allowing for accurate measurement of its effectiveness. By running incrementality tests you get your immediate answer, as well as building more guardrails into your modelling process. In return from modelling, any large channel contribution uncertainties should be added to your testing backlog. Together, these approaches empower marketers to refine their channel selections, and budgets, and maximise their return on investment in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

To wrap up our guide, we've put together some key insights which can be gained from utilising media effectiveness measurement options, and their different uses:

Access to better anonymised data which can be fed into analytics and ads platforms

- → This helps the machine learning in analytics platforms build out better-modelled data for reporting, where individual user consents limit data collection.

Better consented first-party data to share with ad platforms, and activate elsewhere too

- → This helps the machine learning in analytics platforms build out better-modelled data for reporting, where individual user consents limit data collection.

Incrementality testing can prove media channel value in the short to medium-term

- → This is great for testing the effectiveness of new activity or periodically testing existing active media channels. Effectiveness and contribution can change over time, so it's always best to use recent data.
- → Similar methodologies can also be used to test creatives, certainly where you have more control over the exposures.

Media mix modelling provides hard to-get insights on typically difficult to-measure channels, based on past performance

- → This helps the machine learning in analytics platforms build out better-modelled data for reporting, where individual user consents limit data collection.

Used collectively, this all means that you can continue, with confidence, with a media planning and buying strategy for longer-term results, in addition to shorter-term brand performance. Ultimately it is a combination of both which will lead to profitable growth in the longer term.

If you'd like to discuss the advice and recommendations in this report, get in touch today.

CONTRIBUTORS FROM IMPRESSION

Aaron Dicks
Technology Director

Jake Piekarski
Media Effectiveness Executive

Claire Elsworth
Strategy Director

Matthew Ahern
Content Executive

DESIGNED BY

Beck Lee
Digital Designer

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