

Online Display

The demise of Click, the rise of Dwell

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A study into measuring the intrinsic value of online display media and investigation to the nature of advertising and consumer engagement in general. The document is based around a calculated argument for shifting away from historic response-based metrics into a more natural measurement of consumer stimulation.

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Introduction

It would seem the digital advertising industry is currently going through a transitional period. It is as if it has indeed reached puberty; full of hopes, ideas and desires for all it seeks to become, but often lacking the wisdom it needs from mature figures in order to be able to fully achieve its potential. Wisdom that has historically been seen locked away in traditional media mindsets, with their established models and consumer insights tried and tested over many years. This had left a new generation of technologists to seek to define the new 'digital' advertising and its effectiveness based on simple tangible touch points, whilst purporting a misconception that everything can be measured – or worse, reducing everything down to a single lowest common denominator – the click.

It is not a unique spurt of growth. The dot-com crash of 2000 that subsequently wiped out \$5 trillion in market value of technology companies was based on unproven ideas that lacked tangible business evidence, i.e. assured metrics to complement ethereal ideals. Yet Google, with its adoption of Overture's Pay-Per-Click (PPC) model, and rebranding it as *AdWords* was a welcome cry in the wilderness to spur confidence back into online investment,¹ offering a calculated media outlay against measurability.

By mid 2006, with a radical change in digital adoption by the masses and with the likes of MySpace and YouTube hitting the headlines, it was the media and entertainment industry that was behind some of the largest investment deals. Yet once again citing lack of profitability from these high-profile sites, it led many analysts to consider will the dotcom bubble burst again?²

With recession biting hard within 2009, it has pushed many global advertisers more than ever to seek better ROI from their media outlay. Yet with a continual and steady decline in click-thru rates (CTR) and with prior evidence coming to light suggesting that there is 'no correlation between display ad clicks and brand metrics'³ it is increasingly obvious that CTR is not an effective ad negotiation currency, tarnishing the argument that online advertising is more accountable or cost-effective than traditional media.

With an increasing amount of interactive ads served over the last ten years, birthing a plethora of new metrics from expansion rates to video plays, Interaction Rate (IR) has arisen to be quoted extensively on industry benchmarks as agencies seek to move towards measuring consumer

¹ Google Press. Google's Targeted Keyword Ad Program Shows Strong Momentum with Advertisers. 16 August 2000. Available at: <http://www.google.com/press/pressrel/pressrelease31.html>

² Information gleaned *Will dotcom bubble burst again?* as posted by Quad City Times citing LA Times. 2006. Available at: http://www.qctimes.com/business/article_114ea0f5-677a-5487-8f16-de1faca2ddddd.html

³ Information gleaned *Don't Click This Ad* by eMarketer citing 'Natural Born Clickers'. 2008. Available at: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1005977>

‘engagement’. A lack of definition and agreement amongst ad serving technology vendors however has allowed discrepancies to exist at ad level and the resulting fundamental floors in IR have meant a lack of scalability across the digital media industry.⁴ This in turn has ensured the only consistent catch-all metric has remained firmly with CTR despite its obvious faults.

It is against this back-drop in trying to assure a continued confidence in digital advertising, whilst simultaneously taking into account how other aspects of media are currently measured, that the metric Dwell Time (DT) was conceived and the resulting action inquiry process set in place to test validity and refine as necessary.

Establishing an industry phenomenon

Off to a wrong start

At a conference in San Francisco in May of 1994, Ken McCarthy the founder of E-Media, first introduced the concept of a clickable/trackable ad and stated that ‘only a direct response model—in which the return on investment of individual ads was measured—would prove sustainable over the long run for online advertising’.⁵ By October 1994, the first graphical advert for AT&T on HotWired read “Have you ever clicked your mouse right here? You will.” Achieving a staggering 42% click through rate, HotWired coined the term “banner ad” and was the first company to provide Click-Thru Rate (CTR) reports to its customers.⁶

The irony of this methodology was that the media was valued and sold based on the number of impressions they generated (how many times the banner was displayed), not based on a click-response financial model. Furthermore, the advert was placed merely days after the controversial Mosaic Netscape 0.9 was launched which utilized Cookies – a tracking technology that Mosaic had developed for e-Commerce sites – and the basis of online display advertising so that web sites can rely on how to customise what users see and advertisers can use to target ads.⁷

David Burrows, former Head of Ad Technology, Yahoo! Europe, explains “*Without cookies there would be no internet advertising,*” and elaborates, “*there would be no way of knowing unique users*

⁴ Dickman, Matt. *What does interaction rate tell me about the impact of my rich media campaign?* 3 May 2007. Available at: <http://transmissionmarketing.ca/?p=187>

⁵ Information gleaned from *Web Banner*. Wikipedia via CPA Networks. <http://www.cpanetwork.us/banner-advertisements>

⁶ Goddard, Charlotte. *Click here - 10 years of online advertising*. Revloution UK: Brand Republic. 1 December 2003. <http://www.brandrepublic.com/News/197212/10-YEARS-ADVERTISING-INNOVATION-Click---10-years-online-advertising/>

⁷ Reuters. *Google Limits Data Retention in Compromise with EU*. December 2007. Available at: <http://www.cnbc.com/id/19180753/>

*to determine reach and frequency – you would only be able to calculate clicks.”*⁸ In essence, the buying of online media and the delivery of advertising required a greater deal of sophistication than merely hard-coding adverts to a web-page. Yet the measurement offered back to the client in no way took advantage of this new technology, resulting in no more than totting up the number of glorified pictorial hyper-links that web developers were becoming saturated in. There simply was no consideration of the essence of how display advertising actually works.

This ‘click’ concept was further established in online media mindsets with the renaming of Internet Advertising Network (IAN) to DoubleClick. The IAN was originally set up in late 1995 to bring scalability to online advertising, operating from entrepreneur Kevin O’Connor’s basement in Alpharetta, Georgia, along with chief technology officer Dwight Merriman. The subsequent move to New York City’s Madison Avenue afforded the now closer media companies and advertising agencies the ability to outsource their digital ads to DoubleClick who offered targeted ads and measurement thereof.⁹ The brand itself was a misnomer, as for the majority of users seeing online ads, they merely needed to single-click on this hyperlinked ad, not double-click. Either way, despite the targeting and reach/frequency considerations, or the value in post-view arrivals within a designated time-frame, display ads were now doubly-confirmed as graphical elements needing to be clicked upon to be effective.

The third consideration in this establishment of a click-mentality was born out of the dotcom crash. Mosaic’s launch of Netscape and subsequent flotation had heralded the start of the dot-com boom in August 1995.¹⁰ However this was to be short-lived. Poor e-commerce sales from Christmas 1999 were published in quarterly reports of March 2000. Combined with a series of events such as the smooth transition surrounding the Y2K bug, an increase in interest rates, Microsoft being declared a monopoly and then some high-value trading of global technology firms such as Dell, IBM & Cisco – all contributed to the huge negative reaction of investors into the technology arena. By 2002, NASDAQ Composite index was about 40% of what it had been at the peak of the dot-com bubble two years previous.¹¹ The end of the day, the numbers just did not stack up.

The infantile two-year old Google was growing up fast and gaining incredible traction as the market leading search engine. It was looking for sustainable monetisation. This was to be found in borrowing the concept of Overture’s Pay-Per-Click (PPC) model, and rebranding it August 2000 as *AdWords*. These text-based ‘sponsored links’ at the top of search results pages boasted four-times

⁸ Interview of David Burrows, Former Head of Ad Technology, Yahoo! Europe by Dean Donaldson. 18 December 2007.

⁹ Biography.com. Kevin O’Connor Biography. A&E Television Networks. 2000. Available at: <http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9542213>

¹⁰ Information gleaned from *Netscape*. Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netscape>

¹¹ Information gleaned from *Dot-com bubble*. Wikipedia. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dot-com_bubble

higher click through rates than the industry average for traditional display advertising. In the midst of an industry down-turn, Google stood up and announced to the world you only need to pay when someone is delivered to your door. The 'click' was the catalyst to become the saviour of the free-fall in online investment, that and prove unequivocally that there was *gold in them thar hills*. With a simple interface for a whole breed of new advertisers to manage their campaigns performance complete with a simple payment processing system, it gave nervous global brand a confidence to control budgets, and every local business a chance to dabble with online advertising and in turn would soon become the largest performance-based search advertising program to date.¹²

The concept of online as a response-based medium was born, nurtured and grew tall. Google had established that the 'Click' as the single-success metric for all advertising, or so it seemed.¹³ Based on the clickable hyper-link, and aimed at consumers actively looking for something, text-links in search are a natural point for monetisation and justifying ROI for advertisers. It's a mere stepping-stone along a consumer's journey to conversion, and offer sign-posts along the road. However the same cannot be argued with the visual representation of graphical display ads, touch is not the only human sense being stimulated, and certainly not when placed in areas where a consumer is not currently considering the product or service on offer, but rather merely consuming information or entertainment media. A sentiment echoed by Erin Hunter, EVP at comScore who says we need to go beyond the click itself to determine; "Who is clicking? Why are they clicking? And what value, if any, do they hold?"¹⁴

Programmers and not marketers were at the helm of establishing the course of measuring digital display advertising, and it is no wonder that traditional marketers would eventually be so slow to adopt. The industry was setting sail into oblivion from its outset, and as display clicks would later decline, facilitating along with it the growing myth that display advertising is therefore dead too, it is no wonder that now many leading industry thinkers are suggesting to abandon ship.¹⁵

The agency take

New media agencies grew from the two-fold aspect of multimedia CD-ROM's and web sites in the early-to-mid-nineties. The former would allow high-quality photograph or video distribution along with a company overview and the latter saw early websites that were no more than glorified

¹² Google Press. *Google's Targeted Keyword Ad Program Shows Strong Momentum with Advertisers*. 16 August 2000. Available at: <http://www.google.com/press/pressrel/pressrelease31.html>

¹³ Rose, Frank. *Ad Sense? Googlenomics and the Tyranny of Click-Through*. 27 May 2009. Available at: <http://www.deepmediaonline.com/deepmedia/2009/05/ad-sense-googlenomics-and-the-tyranny-of-clickthrough.html>

¹⁴ Guerriero, Joseph. *The Growing Problem with Online Display Advertising*. 1 June 2009. Available at: <http://www.foliomag.com/2009/growing-problem-online-display-advertising-0>

¹⁵ Morrissey, Brian. *Most Marketers Ignore Brand Metrics Online*. 1 June 2009. Available at: http://www.adweek.com/aw/content_display/news/digital/e3i372a427229d39d584c28f7b759d2dc83

brochures or information directories. Following the introduction of vector-based Flash in 1996 (originally named FutureSplash Animator)¹⁶ many sites would take an illustrious and highly animated home pages that served more for the designer's creative ego than for any customer benefit – though it would take some years for connection speeds to reach the level of animation afforded by CD-ROM's. A move to work with programmers would see dynamic web-sites that would eventually offer all kinds of incentives from commerce transactions to full business automation; customer, knowledge and content management without the associated production and distribution costs of CD-ROM's – though in truth beyond porn, the monetisation of the web eluded most web site owners.¹⁷

No sooner as web sites were developed, so the question of driving traffic to them surfaced. Web designers and programmers found they had to take on new roles as online optimizers, trying to figure out the search engine algorithms to gain a higher ranking. Helping consumers find content they may be interested in became the new obsession, and people like Danny Sullivan pioneered this space in 1997 after publishing "A Webmaster's Guide to Search Engines".¹⁸ Optimization paved the way for broader Search Marketing and diluted the technical knowledge required, with agencies eventually bringing in college graduates and teaching them how to use Overture and Google PPC interfaces to manage paid search listings.

Alongside the search aspects, digital creative media was also developing. Modem Media merged with True North Technologies in 1996 to create the largest online advertising agency in the industry.¹⁹ In unison, early pioneers in the digital space saw other independent companies like Victoria Real²⁰ and Icon MediaLab²¹ push the creative merits, Aegis²² push the media aspects and NetPlus²³ and Profero²⁴ adopting a full service integrated creative and media model. By 1998, most of the major established agencies had either bought or launched some type of interactive subsidiary and had begun offering a digital media offering to their client bases. Last but not least, saw the likes of Ogilvy & Mather and J. Walter Thompson embracing the new media revolution and soon there

¹⁶ Gay, Jonathon, *The History of Flash*. 2007. Adobe Systems Inc. Available at: http://www.adobe.com/macromedia/events/john_gay/page04.html

¹⁷ Caruso, Denise. *The interactive media industry begins to deconstruct its self-made myths*. 7 April 1997. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/07/business/the-interactive-media-industry-begins-to-deconstruct-its-self-made-myths.html>

¹⁸ Sullivan, Danny. *A Webmaster's Guide to Search Engines*. 31 January 1997. Available at: <http://scout.wisc.edu/Projects/PastProjects/NH/97-01/97-01-31/0050.html>

¹⁹ Information gleaned from: http://www.vault.com/companies/company_main.jsp?product_id=947&ch_id=265&co_page=2&v=1

²⁰ Information gleaned from: <http://www.startups.co.uk/6678842911023534363/victoria-real.html>

²¹ Information gleaned from: <http://www.lbi.com/en/About-Us/Our-Company/History/>

²² Information gleaned from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isobar_Communications

²³ Information gleaned from: <http://www.netplusmarketing.com/who-we-are/netplus-who-we-are.cfm>

²⁴ Information gleaned from: <http://www.profero.com/uk/about.story.html>

would be many splinter companies offering digital media under global media holding companies such as Omnicom, WPP and Publicis.²⁵

Creative agencies business models were focussed on building interactive experiences – such as those within websites – and then utilising any supportive advertising as a ‘traffic driver’ to these sites, noted as the “response”. Specific campaign micro sites used to create in-depth information about a particular product or service were born and proved to be a great money spinner for creative agencies, they themselves having evolved from the notion of needing a multitude of specific sites based around search keyword optimization or different user interfaces in order to drive sales to the advertiser’s main site.²⁶

Media agency models were about offering scale and tangible points to this ‘response’ and would focus on “media firsts” – interesting and innovative ways of finding and grabbing audience attention then delivering them through to the website. Industry awards would come to reward such innovation. The justification was more about traffic to the site, then any change in brand perception.²⁷

What seems to have happened as a result was that all online advertising has been reduced to a mere numbers game of getting people to leave the content they were within, to go explore something else, somewhere else. It became about attracting the consumer and point them in the direction of where to go and explore in this new web desert – which deserves some merits – as the concept of a contained web high-street had tried and failed several times previously with the likes of Apple’s eWorld in 1994, though it could be argued AOL offered some success to this model originally.²⁸

Measuring the online response

The original metric for ascertaining website visits was “hits” though it was soon increasingly obvious you could inflate hits by adding multiple items on a page, as any loaded element into the page would be added to the number of ‘hits’. With this in mind, the industry quickly moved to “page views” – the number of views a single page got, irrespective of its components contained therein.²⁹

The page view as a web measurement would later become under threat with the likes of Flash and AJAX and other interactive technologies – where people could engage with content without

²⁵ Berger, Warren. *J. Walter Thompson*. April 2000. Available at: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/jwthompson.html>

²⁶ Information gleaned from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsite>

²⁷ Morrissey *supra* note 15

²⁸ Coventry, Joshua. *eWorld: Apple's Overpriced, Poorly Marketed Online Service*. 15 September 2006. Available at: <http://lowendmac.com/coventry/06/apple-eworld.html>

²⁹ Elliott, Stuart. *A report lays down guidelines for any attempt to measure the efficiency of interactive ads*. 3 October 1995. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/03/business/media-business-advertising-report-lays-down-guidelines-for-any-attempt-measure.html>

changing the page – but no one was offering a viable alternative. Ryan Stewart would later suggest that “a good place to start is how much time do users spend with the application on average?”³⁰ Offering glimmers of hope into effective audience measurement.

Website arrivals is only one aspect of website effectiveness, whether they stayed and did something is the real key. Other than the origin of the visitors, the number of returning visitors, the page views per visit and the time on page and total time³¹ on the site offer a deeper understanding of whether the audience is engaged and interested with what they are being exposed to. Moving deeper through web analytics would reveal user journeys or click-streams, and any leakage points of where a user dropped out within a conversion process; fixing this can lead to greater ROI.³²

Yet despite the multitude of valuable data one would look at in regards to website metrics, digital agencies are often ironically reluctant to evolve in keeping with the nature and pace of digital advertising. It would seem simplicity and established methods are easier to ascertain and communicate to decision makers, then a potential complex framework of metrics, especially when media buying networks and agency business models have been developed around click methodology.

The demise of the click

Since their first inception, click thru rates have been in steady decline across all formats globally.

Jeff Hirsh in an article in MediaPost stated; “The initial CTR for display ads was often remarkable, reaching as high as 30 percent in the very early days of online advertising. However, after the novelty for the new ad format wore off, CTR declined dramatically to eventually hover where it is today – an average of only 0.3 percent.”³³

As standard gif and jpeg ads were losing CTR at an alarming rate, new formats would seek to fill in the gap. When rich media was first introduced back in 1999, double-digit CTR’s were not uncommon³⁴ and in the early years, certainly 5% would be a very quotable average. Originally rich media commanded a higher yield for media buying due to the higher response rates seen from serving a more intrusive ad format. This is turn assisted with the support for building and serving these more complex creative ads. The difference in price could be seen between a ten-and-100-fold

³⁰ Stewart, Ryan. *Rich Internet Applications are killing the page view metric*. 1 December 2006. Available at: <http://blogs.zdnet.com/Stewart/?p=186>

³¹ Information gleaned at: <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-to-Measure-Website-Effectiveness-Using-New-Success-Metrics&id=1450489>

³² Information gleaned at: <http://www.audiencedialogue.net/webmeasure.html>

³³ Hirsh, Jeff. *BT: Beyond the Click Through*. 14 January 2008. Available at: http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.printFriendly&art_aid=74208

³⁴ Lockhorn, Jeremy. *Pardon Me, Would You Care to View This Ad?* 15 April 2002. Available at: <http://www.clickz.com/1008671>

increase in serving fees, as well as higher fees for media space.³⁵ By the start of 2004, rich media ads had fallen to just below 3% CTR on average.

Although the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) states “there is no reliable service that tracks [CPM Cost per thousand] or CTR. CTR is highly subject to creative effectiveness which is very campaign specific, while CPM is so dynamic no compilation would be reliable,”³⁶ data is generally published at intervals by each ad serving technology Companies.

DoubleClick DART: DoubleClick Rich Media ads produce a 0.10% CTR in US in 2008. This increases slightly for video ads 0.12%, and larger ad formats can generate 0.23%.³⁷ Latest results see Rich Media in US dropping to 0.09% CTR during 2008 for non-video ads and 0.10% for video ads.³⁸

Atlas ADTECH: The current click-through rate of 0.18% and is the lowest since ADTECH began its banner analyses in 2004, when the average was 0.33%.³⁹

Eyeblaster: According to the end of 2008 results:

- NA CTR: standard ads; 0.09% – Rich Media Polite ads is 0.17%, expandables 0.3%
- EMEA CTR: standard ads; 0.14% – Rich Media Polite ads is 0.21%, expandables 0.66%
- APAC CTR: standard ads; 0.18% – Rich Media Polite ads is 0.25%, expandables 1.02%⁴⁰

The current CTR today actually ranges from around 1:1000 (one ad clicked per one thousand exposures), to an average of 5 in some rich media formats. There are higher exceptions in particular countries or formats, and video seems to vary widely depending on how it is used. But Hirsch is correct, 0.3% would be an acceptable (if slightly high) average over all. The drive to find a new format to pull back high CTR’s have now passed. It is not the format that is the problem; it is the metric – especially when CTR is showing such appallingly low numbers. The result is that the value of display is being undermined and driven down in media price as people try to correlate exposure with immediate response.⁴¹

³⁵ Wilson, Colin. Rich Media is Growing Faster and Faster. 30 October 2003. iMedia Connection. Available at: <http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/2139.asp>

³⁶ Information gleaned from: http://www.iab.net/about_the_iab/faq#17

³⁷ Information gleaned at: http://www.doubleclick.com/insight/pdfs/DoubleClick_Creative_Insights_on_Rich_Media.pdf

³⁸ Information gleaned at: http://www.doubleclick.com/insight/pdfs/dclk_2008benchmarks_0906.pdf

³⁹ Information gleaned at: http://www.adtech.com/edition_no8_int/newsletter_Feb09_CTR.htm

⁴⁰ Information gleaned at: http://www.eyebalster.com/Data/Uploads/ResourceLibrary/Eyebalster_Analytics_Bulletin_Issue_3_March_2009.pdf

⁴¹ Guerriero, *supra* note 14

Not only are the numbers falling drastically, but the value of each click is also being questioned.⁴² Even across ad networks where display ads are very much focussed on click-thru as a success metric are under question, as Herbert Dazo, Head of Ad Technology, Yahoo! Europe explains “Remnant inventory – performance networks – are being hampered by terrible ads which counter performance. Really these ads if any should be targeted data capture ads to assist in driving conversions, not brand or reach... currently they are the advertising equivalent of spam.”⁴³

It has long been suggested that the high CTR seen in intrusive floating ads and pop-ups in the early days of rich media were due to accidental clicks of people trying to close down the ad format. Hirsch agrees and suggests consumer intention is one of the most valuable metrics “Advertisers want to know why people are clicking on their ads. There is a huge delta between the site visitor who clicks on a web link and then on their browser's back button a few seconds later, and the visitor who goes to several site pages and ends up making a purchase.”⁴⁴

Over the last couple of years a number of studies have been done trying to understand the mindset of the ‘clicker’. In February 2008, a study called “Natural Born Clickers” from Starcom Chicago, Tacoda and comScore’s suggested “the click is dead” as go-to measurement of effectiveness for display advertising campaigns. The study showed that heavy clickers are not representative of the general public – that only 6% of Internet surfers are responsible for 50% of the clicks online.⁴⁵

The study also showed a skew towards younger audience and lower-income consumers who may spend a larger amount of time online, but are less likely to purchase on site arrival.⁴⁶

In October of the same year, iPerceptions produced similar findings through its own research and found that “four out of ten US Internet users surveyed who were likely to click on any type of online ad made less than \$50,000 per year” and this was a trend even more exaggerated towards those who clicked on video ads.⁴⁷

Yet despite the demographics what is more alarming is the notion of brand-building. With huge investments in either banner design or micro sites to establish brands, one of the most incredible findings in the ‘Natural Born Clickers’ study is;

⁴² Robinson, Noah. *CTR Is A Bad Metric For Most Brand Campaigns*. 8 April 2009. Available at: <http://noahrobinson.wordpress.com/2009/04/08/ctr-is-a-bad-metric-for-most-brand-campaigns/>

⁴³ Interview with Herbert Dazo by author on 4th April 2008.

⁴⁴ Hirsh *supra note* 33

⁴⁵ *New Study Shows that Heavy Clickers Distort Reality of Display Advertising Click-Through Metrics*. Starcom MediaVest Press Release. 2008. Available at: http://www.smggroup.com/news_popup_flash.asp?pr=1643

⁴⁶ Fred. *Natural Born Clickers - Online Marketing*. 12 February 2008. Available at: <http://itola.com/business/natural-born-clickers-and-online-marketing/>

⁴⁷ eMarketer. *Online Ad Clicker Demographics*. 22 October 2008. Available at: <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1006648>

“The data suggests no correlation between display ad clicks and brand metrics, and show no connection between measured attitude towards a brand and the number of times an ad for that brand was clicked. The research presentation suggests that when digital campaigns have a branding objective, optimizing for high click rates does not necessarily improve campaign performance.”⁴⁸

Erin Hunter, executive vice president at comScore elaborated, “while the click can continue to be a relevant metric for direct response advertising campaigns, this study demonstrates that click performance is the wrong measure for the effectiveness of brand-building campaigns.”⁴⁹ Though I would still agree with Hirsch, that intent is a true measure and the ‘direct-response’ in terms of a conversion lies way deeper within the web site than merely justified by a click alone.⁵⁰

Advertisers are not buying it

The argument for clicks also has had little success in offering measurability and accountability in terms of shifting advertising budgets into online, which was the prime purpose.

According to an US study in 2008 by USC Annenberg School for Communication: Center for the Digital Future, the Centre’s director Jeffrey Cole stated, “we’re clearly now seeing a path to the end of the printed daily newspapers – a trend that is escalating much faster than we had anticipated.” Having monitored consumer habits online for the last eight years spanning 23 countries, Cole reveals that “in 1994 fewer than two of every ten Americans used the Internet; in 2009, more than eight in ten Americans go online.”⁵¹ Also the time spent online is increasing. In terms of reading news online, for example, in 2008, the average internet user was spending 53 minutes per week, up from 41 minutes per week in 2007 – which led ‘22 percent of users to stop their subscription to a printed newspaper or magazine because they could access the same content online.’

Martin Bertoni, Creative Director at PointRoll, highlights the growing chasm between consumer behaviour and advertising spend. Quoting the IAB’s Internet Advertising Revenue Report,⁵² he illustrates that of \$186.9 billion spent on US advertising in 2008, only \$23.4 billion (13%) was used

⁴⁸ *Supra note 45*

⁴⁹ *Supra note 45*

⁵⁰ *Hirsh supra note 33*

⁵¹ Cole, Jeffrey. *Annual Internet Survey by the Center for the Digital Future Finds Large Increases in Use of Online Newspapers*. 28 April 2009. Available at: http://www.digitalcenter.org/pdf/2009_Digital_Future_Project_Release_Highlights.pdf

⁵² *IAB Internet Advertising Revenue Report*. March 2009. Available at: http://www.iab.net/media/file/IAB_PwC_2008_full_year.pdf

for online campaigns. Discounting search, email, classifieds, lead generation and others – it leaves only \$6.5 billion or “3% of the ad dollars spent in '08 went to display advertising.”⁵³

Something is drastically wrong with what is being offered to advertisers, compared to consumer behaviour. When we consider two-thirds of a magazine – including multiple full page spreads – are devoted to advertising.⁵⁴ Magazine ads generally enhance the experience of the consumer to deliver them information that leads to desire from pure visual stimuli alone – even expecting a cover price for the magazine – the web can boast no such ratio, even with the enhancement of touch.

The online industry has shied away from imposing formats, for fear of negative reactions or accidental clicks. Both the essence of understanding the nature of advertising, as well as an indication of its performance has been diluted by early technologists with no ability to persuade marketers or publishers of the lasting benefits, beyond a so-called instant reaction.

All in all, click is the wrong measurement for display advertising – aided through the dot com crash, and relevant in a search environment – it is not a sufficient metric to tell what user is doing as far as display advertising is concerned. A click alone is unqualified, and reveals nothing of accident or intention, or of a positive change in favour of a brand. Clicking on display ads is the equivalent of walking into a bar to see a friend for a pint and some salesman trying to stop you on route, pull you into a corner and to try to convince you to buy something. It’s totally counter-culture to human behaviour, and any small success is not justifiable to the vast wastage encountered. This is summed up by Daniel Jaye, CEO of Tacoda; “one of the underlying values of looking at people and not just pages in our business is that we are able to help uncover behaviour that is counterintuitive to what much of the media world assumes about online audiences.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Bertoni, Martin. *How About a Little Revolution in Display Advertising?* 19 May 2009. Available at: http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=106294

⁵⁴ Crosier, Keith. *Advertising-to-editorial ratio*. 1998. Available at: <http://www.westburnpublishers.com/marketing-dictionary/a/advertising-to-editorial-ratio.aspx>

⁵⁵ *Supra note 45*

The search for a new metric

The floor of interaction

With the rise of rich media, came the rise of Brand-Response display adverts. The concept was to deliver micro site content within an ad format, either upon roll-over expansion or within a number of the larger size formats. The functionality of the ad went beyond mere exposure of the message to allow 'direct contact with consumers, product demonstrations, getting involved with inventory'.⁵⁶ A plethora of new metrics would come to the horizon to measure every possible permutation of user interactivity with the ad, including the ability to shorten the conversion cycle by allowing conversions to happen within the banner itself as a result of brand interplay or product discovery.

Once Broadband penetration started to reach a level of acceptability around 2004, so to the ability for video to be served into ads became mainstream. With it came a whole load range of new touch points, as well as percentage of video viewed. 'Time' was of an essence; in order to reveal that consumers were just as likely online to sit through a linear video commercial in a banner ad, as they would in front of a television. The problem of auto-start, repeat plays and default sound-off would prove troublesome in rich media inBanner video, but less so within inStream formats like PreRoll.⁵⁷

In a move to simplify the complex touch points in rich media, a single catch-all metric known as Interaction Rate (IR) came to the surface. It would seek to measure the number of positive touch points within any given creative and then divide that number by the number of exposures. This was then offered across all display ad sizes and formats irrespective of the simplicity or complexity of content contained therein.

Two key problems arose immediately from its inception. One creative execution could be a simple video with two touch-points, e.g. 'start video' and 'sound on'.⁵⁸ Another creative execution could be an expandable advert with multiple video streams, include a game with multiple touch points and then finally result in data-capture to aid the conversion process. In this second example IR could well exceed 100%, as the number of touch points on average could be higher than the number of exposures, even though a small number of people were performing these many interactions, i.e. 100 impressions, 50 people, 5 who interacted 30 times – would still produce 150% IR. Without clarification of the decision to 'respond' either inBanner or on web site, it is near impossible from IR alone to reveal the nature of intent, nor can one argue the value of a higher interaction rate of a

⁵⁶ *Supra* note 25

⁵⁷ Cohen, Heidi. *Measuring Online Video Ads*. 8 June 2006. Available at: <http://www.clickz.com/3611571>

⁵⁸ Evan, *Interaction Rate as a Viable Metric?* 11 February 2007. Available at: <http://www.costpernews.com/archives/interaction-rate-as-a-viable-metric/>

game over a video ad, for example. Shapes, sizes, sectors become irrelevant – it is all to do with physical points of measurement within any creative execution.

The second aspect of Interaction Rate is that no independent third party ever determined the correct way for each ad serving vendor to measure interactions across the online industry. Should a closing of a panel be positive and included or negative and dismissed, for example? As DoubleClick reveals in its ‘creative insights in rich media’ report, “each rich media vendor calculates interactions in a different way, and many vendors do not disclose details on their methodology. As a result, it is impossible to compare interaction rates between vendors in a meaningful way.”⁵⁹

With all these factors in mind for anyone to quote Interaction Rate's in 2009, let alone seek to declare a benchmark, is the equivalent of quoting page "hits" back in 1999. They both can be falsely inflated. Just as website metrics had to move quickly away from hits, so the online advertising industry must move away from Interaction Rate to maintain credibility with advertisers.

Defining engagement

Online engagement became a buzzword for the online industry to try and give some kind of credibility to this new media, and as such ‘engagement’ came to be used interchangeably with interactivity, i.e. a user physically touching an advert, or perhaps a click-stream through a website. It took on a life of its own following a report published by Nielsen in 2005 arguing that engagement should serve as the new measurement metric for media, especially interactive advertising. “Many metrics have been offered as proof that the medium has finally arrived,” Nielsen says. “Yet the one that is probably both the best proof and the most often ignored is consumer engagement.”⁶⁰

“One way to look at engagement is pages viewed” suggests Geoff Ramsey of eMarketer, but then he quickly points out, “some, in fact, would say that television, with its high quality sight, sound and emotional qualities, is the most engaging medium.”⁶¹ He touches on something that is the most challenging aspect of measuring brand perceptions, the “feeling” created in the consumer’s mind that should be the essence of good advertising, not always seen by an impulse reaction.

VideoEgg took this a stage beyond when it offered its “cost per engagement” model, only charging advertisers for physically interacting with the video ad.⁶² Although only charging when a consumer rolls into the ad, it denies both those who are ‘aware’ of the brand but do not seek to touch and offers no apparent solution for accidental rollovers or of those who leave before completion of the

⁵⁹ *Supra* note 37

⁶⁰ Ramsey, Geoff. *Engage Me*. 3 June 2005. Available at: <https://www.imediaconnection.com/printpage/printpage.aspx?id=6043>

⁶¹ *Supra* note 60

⁶² *VideoEgg tries ‘Cost per Engagement’* 20 February 2008. Available at: http://www.videoegg.com/press/adweek_adframes

entire video message. It is therefore equally unqualified as a click, yet minimizing financial risk to the advertiser.

Display advertising charges are generally based on a CPM (cost per mille/ thousand) model because it is a different form of advertising to that seen in search from a consumer behaviour perspective, therefore any interaction or click is going to only play a partial notion in terms of full advertising effectiveness, which has led some media owners to try and justify CPM value for online against print exposures⁶³. When people visit any given website like BBC news, Facebook, etc. their motivation is rarely to visit to purchase an advertiser's product. They are primarily interested or 'engaged' in the editorial content or interaction with their communication service, yet we continue to assume instant consumer reactions to justify any value.⁶⁴

This is dramatically different to when someone is searching on the search engines like Google where consumers actively 'engaged' in seeking a product or service. As such all display advertising, in whatever location or media channel, needs to grab a consumers attention away from its surroundings and get the message across effectively, often within exceptionally small time frames – from 70MPH on a motorway, to the speed of flicking through a page, or navigating content online. Display advertising is typically utilised where brand building or reinforcement is crucial for the advertiser or in an effort to reach audiences that otherwise wouldn't have searched for the given service via the search engines by highlighting something to them, often enhanced by the relevance of the context of their environment. Noticing the brand in a relevant position can 'engage' the consumer to explore further, either immediately or a suitable time in the future. Various studies, such as iPerception's 'Integration' study, reveal the 38% of consumers 'eventually perform a search on the company, product, or service that is the focus of the online display ad.'⁶⁵

It is the notion of seeking a hard core quantitative metric of 'engagement' that is most difficult to ascertain, as opposed to measure something deeply qualitative within the human psyche. The problem arises with the assumption that a physical touch indicates true customer intent. Engagement in its truest form 'is a "heart" metric we are trying to measure with "head" data.'⁶⁶ So if engagement is a core qualitative feeling, it makes it much more difficult to identify 'success' when discussing online presence. Without a clear definition, the trap we fall into in measuring

⁶³ Larson, Stephen. Valuation of online display advertising. 9 June 2007. Available at: <http://www.our-hometown.com/valuation.html>

⁶⁴ Allen, Larry. *How transparency might save display ads*. 20 March 2009. Available at: <http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/22522.asp>

⁶⁵ iPerceptions. *Search Engine Marketing and Online Display Advertising Integration Study*. May 2009. Available at: http://www.iprospect.com/about/researchstudy_2009_searchanddisplay.htm

⁶⁶ Kaushik, Avinash. *"Engagement" Is Not A Metric, It's An Excuse*. 1 October 2007. Available at: <http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/2007/10/engagement-is-not-a-metric-its-an-excuse.html>

engagement, i.e. ‘something that is hard to action or something that will rarely improve the bottom-line.’⁶⁷

There is a key differentiator between the *kind* of engagement and *degree* of engagement. The latter can be measured as a quantifiable way, e.g. what the user did; how, where, when, but this is radically different to the kind of engagement – whether apathetic or enlightened towards a brand – the qualification of which lays outside the realms of mere physical touch points alone.⁶⁸ This is imperative to hold in balance as we move forward to define new metrics, and realise the limits of what the data is saying in terms of the degree of engagement, potentially it may ‘lead to questions about measuring the Kind on Engagement (and to exploring qualitative measures).’⁶⁹

Digital agencies often point at floors in panel-measurement of BARB for Television analysis or Gross Rating Points (GRP) adhered to by traditional media as an effective yard-stick with which to measure modern consumer behaviour. These metrics are cited as gross assumptions and out dated methods that have no basis in today’s homes where people are not just transfixed around a single television screen, but now simultaneously working across a multiplicity of media devices and where a combination of passive/active activities are now equally common place.⁷⁰ However, exposure to messages, especially when utilising multiple senses like audio-visual, have seen impacts in a resulting behaviour elsewhere – such as foot-fall in shops, where a consumer would buy a certain brand.

The basis is that I may not be looking for a new car now, may not be interacting with any adverts, but am exposed to a plethora of messaging across media channels that is shaping and influencing my desire towards one brand over another. This is what Robert Heath calls ‘Low Level Processing’ and how this impacts advertising. He summarises it as “*low involvement does not translate to low impact – just more subtle!*” It was perceived you could never build a brand through print because it is predominantly a response medium, but Stella Artois turned this theory on its head when they built their brand through print. Basically they took how to measure TV and applied same analysis to print. What they did was demonstrated that the last 50 years of advertising was quite possibly the wrong way. It was only discovered in 2001. What the study showed was that people do not ‘consciously’

⁶⁷ Supra note 66

⁶⁸ Papadakis, Theo. *Defining ‘Customer Engagement’*. 4 January 2008. Available at: <http://agoraplace.wordpress.com/2008/01/04/defining-customer-engagement/>

⁶⁹ Kaushik, Avinash. *Measuring Online Engagement: What Role Does Web Analytics Play?* 29 January 2008. Available at: <http://www.kaushik.net/avinash/2008/01/measuring-online-engagement-what-role-does-web-analytics-play.html>

⁷⁰ Karp, Scott. *Engagement Is a Euphemism For Measuring the ROI of Brand Advertising*. 3 October 2006. Available at: <http://publishing2.com/2006/10/03/engagement-is-a-euphemism-for-measuring-the-roi-of-brand-advertising/>

take in the message, but any effect happens because of different part of brain takes it in, so this is not as easily measured as once assumed.⁷¹

Colour/placement will have an effect; different creative's will have effect; different request upon the consumer – to remember (brand) or perform action (response) – but these effects may be relational to where the consumer was at any given moment in time and therefore not as influenced directly by the immediacy of advertising as traditional marketers would have us believe. Robert Heath's theory of 'the hidden power of advertising' discusses low involvement processing of consumers who are who are more emotionally than cognitively charged in terms of decision making. It is tapping in to the realms of experience and emotion than knowledge that produces the greatest impacts, which puts 'and now the science bit' of the advert into a much smaller chunk of the effects of the consumer than previously thought.

Ken Kaess, CEO DDB Worldwide elaborates, *"following Heath's theory, instead of focusing on what people tell us directly about a product or commercial, new techniques will need to focus on the emotions and associations a brand communication taps into."*⁷²

This is in addition to other factors like personal recommendation or appeal at seeing vehicle on the road. At a point of decision to purchase, I may already know the exact brand I will go for and at some point that purchase can be tracked, and hopefully the numbers are increased as a result of any financial outlay of exposure through media. Matthew Roche, the former General Manager of Omniture suggests, "The biggest concern that most branding folks have is that testing is too focused on direct response approaches. They fear that the emphasis on closing the deal in a session kills the long-term brand investment."⁷³

If this is the nature of display advertising in any form, the arguments for immediacy have to take second place to the *kind* of heart engagement and subsequent *degree* of physical engagement.⁷⁴

A change in methodology

There is a lot of controversial discussion⁷⁵ on the view thru v click thru debate⁷⁶ on driving conversions, also known as post-impression or post-click. The concept of someone seeing then arriving at a site within a designated time frame is argued is not as impactful as someone who

⁷¹ Heath, R. 2001. *The Hidden Power of Advertsing*. 2001. Admap Monographs.

⁷² Kaess, K. 2001. *The Hidden Power of Advertising*. Low Attention Processing. 2001. Available at: <http://www.lowattentionprocessing.com/VCC%20Hidden%20Power%2014.4.02.html>

⁷³ Roche, Matthew. *Brand Testing - Only the Holes Taste the Same*. 14 January 2008. Available at: http://www.conversionchronicles.com/Brand_Testing_-_Only_the_Holes_Taste_the_Same.html

⁷⁴ Donaldson, Dean. *Let's get engaged*. 14 May 2008. Available at: <http://deandonaldson.wordpress.com/2008/05/14/lets-get-engaged/>

⁷⁵ Information gleaned at: <http://justinhind.wordpress.com/2009/02/03/the-economics-of-a-click-vs-impression/>

⁷⁶ Information gleaned at: <http://bhhmarketing.blogspot.com/2008/03/view-through-vs-click-through.html>

immediately clicks on an advert. Either one, in terms of a qualified conversion, reveals a degree of engagement of the consumer towards the brand. Yet with 2:1,000 clicks v 998:1,000 impressions, can we truly argue that all 998 are wasted?

In many cases conversions of post impression vs post-click can be much higher than 4:1 in favour of impression, especially where the creative has higher impact afforded by rich media.⁷⁷

ComScore sought to investigate the value of 'view-thru' in their report 'Whither the click?' that seeks to elaborate on how online display actually works. "With online display ads yielding click-thru rates of less than 0.1 percent, advertisers can no longer rely on click-thrus to gauge online ad performance. Doing so fails to capture the impact of advertising impressions – or view-thru – on attitude and future behavior, which are essential metrics in assessing the complete return on an investment in online advertising," states Evan Neufeld, comScore Vice President of Advertising Solutions.⁷⁸

The report discovers that 'rarely does a purchase happen in the same session as the display advert exposure, and even more rarely as a result of a click'. The findings indicates a 65% lift in site visits and 52% lift in searches after the first week of display ad exposure, with a tail off to 46% lift in site visit and 38% lift in search after a four-week timeframe, suggesting a strong latency affect of the exposure. From investigating display effects on sales both on e-Commerce sites and offline sales, the latent results can extend to weeks also. The results show a 42.1% lift in online sales and a 10.1% lift in offline sales as a result of display exposure, and an even more dramatic effect when combined with search – 173% lift for online sales, and a 53% lift for in-store sales.⁷⁹

Another aspect other than context is also reach and frequency, i.e. how many people have seen a creative and how many times they are been exposed to it. The desire is to optimize messaging based on how many adverts shown to generate the best response, even with an aside from any behavioural targeting attributes. With this approach coming to light, it suggest more testing into the formats, sizes and creative executions and the effects on site traffic, performed searches and online and offline conversions. These are all a much deeper level of engagement to test against then merely optimising against click-thru, as well as more pertinent at delivering a greater overall ROI. No other medium can offer this level of detailed real-time analysis within a set campaign execution.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Information gleaned at:

http://www.eyebmaster.com/Data/Uploads/ResourceLibrary/Path%20to%20Conversion_2009.pdf

⁷⁸ Fulgoni, Gian. *How Online Advertising Works: Whither The Click?* 5 December 2008. Available at:

http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Presentations_Whitepapers/2008/How_Online_Advertising_Works_Whither_The_Click

⁷⁹ *Supra* note 78

⁸⁰ Goddard, *supra* note 6

If the response sought is hidden beyond the click – and seen as a combined effect of display and search – so equally we must widen this to incorporate all display across media channels. The latest TNS research is showing this is an active desire amongst senior marketers, and indeed 67% of all campaigns are now considered cross-channel yet only 12% are being analysed as such.⁸¹ Never has this been more of a concern than the advent of social media facilitating a two-way communication dialogue between consumers and brands, either positive or negative. Understanding the nature of consumer ‘buzz’ and its ability to drive brand awareness co-exists with display advertising, and does not replace it – especially since “word-of-mouth about brands is largely driven by paid media ads.”⁸²

It would appear foolish to assume people consume media in silos the way the advertising industry is currently split, and this divide often leads to heated debate between digitalists and traditionalists. Digital marketers argue for a fundamental shift in modern consumer behaviour that traditional marketers are yet to understand. Traditionalists would refute this on one hand stating it’s a niche area of concern – though becoming more mass-media – but more powerfully that assertions are being made that are counter-intuitive to how people learn and remember. It comes down to whether ‘the dinos can learn technology faster than the techies can learn the tricks of persuasion.’⁸³

At Cannes Lions 2009, ‘participation media’ escalated by modern consumer feedback and afforded by the rise of online content, suggests that the pervasiveness of digital creeping into all channels has ensured that there is now a complete blur across the entire media landscape. Nigel Morris, CEO, Aegis highlighted the shift from ‘bought media to owned media to earned media’ as a new model for agencies to base around consumer journeys. It is a move towards interconnection, ‘from channels of content to networks of communication where consumer networks are completely central.’ Morris revealed research has shown that ‘67% of search’s online are a result of exposure to offline media - 30+% of which result in actual sales.’⁸⁴

This sentiment throughout Cannes was echoed by Jonathan Mildenhall, Vice President Global Marketing Strategy and Creative Communications, Coca-Cola who stated that from here on in, ‘we need to see a lot of consolidation across traditional and digital agencies – all focused around consumer journeys’. Stefan Olander, Global Director of Brand Connections, Nike agrees; ‘It’s time to throw the silos off a cliff and seek to embrace a more holistic partnership throughout media. We must embrace consumer content’.⁸⁵

⁸¹ O’Malley, Gavin. *Study: CMOs Want More Cross-Channel Data*. 15 June 2009. Available at: http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=107860

⁸² Neff, Jack. *Future of advertising? Print, TV, online ads*. 1 June 2009. Available at: http://corporate.lexisnexis.com/news/marketing,print-online-marketing/cat300003_doc984781490.html

⁸³ *Supra* note 25

⁸⁴ Author’s own notes published at: <http://blogs.imediaconnection.com/BlogDetail.aspx?BlogID=740>

⁸⁵ *Supra* note 84

Bridging this divide in understanding is the challenge of companies like Dynamic Logic & Millward Brown are addressing, revealing the need for optimizing a combination of communication channels against marketing objectives. In a recent study 'Building Cross-Media Norms' the analysis of the combined effect of television, print and online media in shifting consumer brand perceptions.

"For example, when evaluating the consumer package goods industry, our data suggest print advertising alone may produce a greater effect in purchase intent than opportunity to see three media. However, when building awareness, such as launching a new product line or repositioning a brand, the combination of all three media exhibits the largest probability for an improved awareness measure."⁸⁶

The combination of being exposed to something, arousing interest, encouraging exploration, investigating viability and strengthening desire to purchase – let alone where the transaction ultimately takes place – will have a multitude of potential scenarios at best grouped together by industry sector or demographic, but can never be calculated within a single touch point.

Experiential learning

The ability to build a brand works on the premise of the way humans stand to learn. According to Lavidge and Steiner there is a process by which advertising commonly works; "consumers normally do not switch from disinterested individuals to convinced purchasers in *one instantaneous step*. Rather they approach the ultimate purchase through a process or series of steps in which the actual purchase is but the final threshold." They go on to illustrate a process which portrays consumers passing through a series of sequential phases starting from brand or advertising awareness (cognitive stage), to favourability or preference (affective stage) and finally to actual purchase (behavioural stage).⁸⁷ Kotler and Armstrong call these stages, 'Buyer readiness stages'.⁸⁸ Other versions include 'DAGMAR: Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results'⁸⁹ and the hierarchy-of-effects model; Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action model.⁹⁰

Within an advertising programme, Kotler and Armstrong suggest that two areas need to be evaluated; the 'communication effect' and 'the sales effect'.⁹¹ They suggest the communication effect would require a series of research tests, though the sale effect could be evaluated through sales expenditure and other such company information. Measuring communication effectiveness in this

⁸⁶ Havlena, W., Kalluf, A., Cardarelli, R. *Building Cross-Media Norms*. March 2008. Available at: http://www.dynamiclogic.com/na/research/whitepapers/docs/ESOMAR08_DL_BuildingCrossMediaNorms.pdf

⁸⁷ Lavidge, R. J., Steiner, G.A. "A Model of Predictive Measurements of Advertising Effectiveness," 1961. Available at: <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~tecas/syllabi2/adv382ifall2002/readings/lavidg.pdf>

⁸⁸ Kotler, P., Armstrong, G. *Principles of Marketing*. 1996. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, Inc. p 463-464

⁸⁹ Coley, H. *Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results*. 1961. New York: Association of National Advertisers.

⁹⁰ Strong, E.K. *The Psychology of Selling*. 1925. New York. McGraw-Hill

⁹¹ Kotler, P., Armstrong, G. *Supra* note 88 p 507-508

case is to do with moving towards purchasing, not the counting of clicks or web page views.

‘Effectiveness may have more to do with the readiness of the viewer to consider the benefits the advertisement promotes, than the advertisement itself.’⁹²

Frank Rose, sees this communication effect from an advertising perspective as the art of storytelling. He sees the digital age has usurped the centuries of linear storytelling, into a multi-media narrative in a nonlinear fashion that expects you to participate across devices. “Stories that are not just entertaining but immersive, that take you deeper than an hour-long TV drama or a two-hour movie or a 30-second spot will permit.”⁹³ As a result boundaries once clearly defined are beginning to blur, between ‘storyteller and audience, content and marketing, illusion and reality.’

This active participation is not actually new at all. When discussing educational philosophy, the learner's subjective experience is of critical importance in the learning process as opposed to the mere learning of facts; something the American education reformer John Dewey stated in 1938, “There is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education.”⁹⁴ This cognitive learning theory stems from Gestalt psychology and the influential work in the twenties and thirties of Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, known for his work studying children who believed ‘children developed best in a classroom with interaction’, and who devised a model on how individuals gather and organise information to make sense of their worlds.⁹⁵

Dewey felt traditional lectures merely provided information but the pupil must act upon the information through experience prior to the acquisition of knowledge. He argued that ‘good experiences motivate, encourage, and enable students to go on to have more valuable learning experiences, whereas, poor experiences tend to lead towards a student closing off from potential positive experiences in the future’.⁹⁶

With a note of caution echoed by Kaushik, for those who wish to lock engagement into interaction,⁹⁷ Dewey’s thoughts on the nature of experience offer a similar warning, as he stipulates that; ‘Activity by itself never constitutes experience. The concept of experience involves the aspects of doing and undergoing. When the individual experiences something, he both acts upon it and enjoys or

⁹² Phillips, Jennifer. *Measuring the Effectiveness of Your Advertising Campaign*. 16 September 2008. Available at: <http://www.articlesbase.com/marketing-articles/measuring-the-effectiveness-of-your-advertising-campaign-564280.html>

⁹³ Rose, Frank. *Welcome to the Hyperdrome*. January 2009. Available at: <http://www.deepmediaonline.com/deepmedia/welcome-to-the-hyperdrome.html>

⁹⁴ Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. 1938/1997. New York. Simon and Schuster.

⁹⁵ Cully, Iris V. And Cully, Kendig B, eds. *Harper’s Encyclopaedia of Religious Education*. San Francisco. Harper & Row. 1990, s.v. “Learning Theory,” by C.R. Dykstra, p. 370.

⁹⁶ *Supra* note 94. Excerpt available at: <http://www.wilderdom.com/experiential/SummaryJohnDeweyExperienceEducation.html>

⁹⁷ *Supra* note 66

undergoes the consequences of it. The connection between these active and passive elements in experience is the measure of the experiential value.⁹⁸

As a result Dewey proposed a three-stage model of ‘observation, knowledge, judgement’ which attempts to put together what is observed and what is recalled to ascertain together what they signify. The model process seeks to break apart aspects of learning in order to better understand, test out, and make use of the main components by isolating each into a particular stage.⁹⁹

In 1984, David Kolb felt that a period of reflection was missing from Dewey’s earlier model and proposed a 4-stage model ‘experience, review, conclude, plan’. It was in part based on the father of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) and his ‘field theory’ that sought to understand social behaviour and group dynamics and their impact on an individual. An illustration of this is best observed in the Lucas film ‘Star Wars’. Obi wan Kenobi’s wish for Luke Skywalker was, “may the force [field] be with you,” but equally Luke had to influence the force.¹⁰⁰ Similarly learning through experimentation is subject to external factors and influencers, each concentric cycle of developing contributing to the end goal.

Kolb’s derived model and related materials¹⁰¹ have influenced the work of many in the life-long learning, development and education fields and sees a cyclical pattern of any learning participant involved in a ‘Concrete Experience, followed by Reflective Observation, then the formation of Abstract Conceptualizations before finally conducting Active Experimentation to test out the newly developed principles.’¹⁰²

The way of learning is illustrated in the way children are encouraged to play and explore their environment, to experience something using their motor activity and multiple senses – from sight of bright colours and sound of squeaky noises, to feeling the surface of things and even putting things in their mouths. “Play is so important. It's the way children learn about the world around them,” states Kathleen Alfano, Ph.D., Director of Child Research at Fisher-Price.¹⁰³ “From birth, parents must choose toys and learning tools for their child that are fun and enjoyable to play with and that also foster sensorial growth to ensure a more complete development process,”¹⁰⁴ she insists. The connection of these senses, combined with repetition assists is what constitutes as an ultimate ‘peg’

⁹⁸ Taken from <http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee501/dewey.html>

⁹⁹ Information gleaned at: <http://wilderdom.com/experiential/elc/ExperientialLearningCycle.htm>

¹⁰⁰ Information gleaned at: <http://wilderdom.com/theory/FieldTheory.html>

¹⁰¹ Kolb, David A. *Experience Based Learning Systems, Inc.* (EBLS) is a research and development company devoted to advancement of the theory, research and practice of experiential learning. <http://www.learningfromexperience.com/>

¹⁰² *Supra* note 99

¹⁰³ Information gleaned at: <http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=661&e=expertdetails&expert=kathleen>

¹⁰⁴ Information gleaned at: *Learning Through Senses – The Key To A Child's Development.* News Canada. <http://www.betterliving.co.nz/content/theFamily/babyandtoddler/learning-through-sences.aspx>

in the memory in order to be able to recall associations for language development – and continues in a more advanced form as human’s develop.¹⁰⁵

Even though at ages eleven-to-fifteen years in the notion of a parent instructing ‘look, don’t touch’ is a hard shift for a developing young person. Touch is intrinsic to basic human learning. This ‘formal operation’ stage is seen as a conclusive development in children’s education psychology, in which a young person is then able to solve abstract problems logically.¹⁰⁶ As Stanford C. Ericksen contends ‘the moment of instructional truth occurs when a student grasps the meaning of an important idea; all else is a means to the end of understanding.’¹⁰⁷

It is this sense of ‘learning’ and the involvement of multi-sensory participation that offers the most insight into changing perceptions and behaviours of behalf of advertisers for their consumers to learn of the product or service and likely to explore and remember it.

However, just as Kolb is not without many critiques who feel that the subjective nature of learning and the lack of evidence for measuring the non-conscious development of psycho-motor skill may result in false conclusions, and furthermore cannot help understand and explain change and new experiences,¹⁰⁸ so equally any engagement “heart” metric we are trying to measure with “head” data in advertising must be subject to critique.¹⁰⁹

Experiential branding

Kolb’s model potentially has a basis that can be developed for analysing modern consumer life-cycles and how they relate to knowledge, information and experience within advertising, and equally set out a framework for testing the methods of measuring advertising. In this regard the fact there is not so much a purchase funnel, but rather a case for concentric circles contained therein within an overall life-cycle. The classic model of “attract-convert-retain” is about shifting a person’s sub-conscious cognitive awareness, through sensory interaction to an emotional connection then seen in a tangible response; the ultimate desired response being a purchase.

There are a couple of existing models currently used within advertising. The first is often termed an AIDA model (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) developed by Elmo Lewis in 1898. AIDA is widely accepted and based on the idea that people make choices consciously and deliberately. Lewis claimed that advertising can move a product one step along the chain through a ‘marketing funnel’; e.g. a single campaign can either grab attention for a new product; raise interest for an existing

¹⁰⁵ Woolfolk, Anita E. *Education Psychology*, 4th ed. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. Prentice-Hall. 1990, p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁷ Ericksen, Stanford C. *The Essence of Good Teaching: Helping Students Learn and Remember What They Learn*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass. 1984, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Information gleaned at: <http://reviewing.co.uk/research/experiential.learning.htm>

¹⁰⁹ *Supra* note 66

product; promote desire for a product; or motivate immediate action to purchase the product. However, a single campaign cannot move a product through all four stages at a single time.¹¹⁰

DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results) was presented by Colley in 1961 which focuses on the states of mind a consumer goes through, arguing that the majority of our choices unconsciously as opposed to the conscious AIDA view. This model is an attempt to explain the effect of advertising on the largely unaware public, who due to external pressures continually fall back through memory lapses and continually fighting purchase resistance. Starting with a promotion mix the campaign successively moves the product through the stages of unawareness to awareness, comprehension, preference and conviction to action.¹¹¹ It is similar in theory to Vance Packard's 1957 book *The Hidden Persuaders* about media manipulation. Packard suggested that advertisers used "motivational research" to make appeals to us based on deep psychological studies and often present their messages to us outside our awareness.¹¹²

There is still a huge need for evidence to address multi-sensory approach to branding across fragmented media channels beyond Dynamic Logic & Millward Brown's studies,¹¹³ to move towards the kind of combined campaign 'persona' data. Most campaigns are specific around a theme and run cross-channel and the effects of a single "siloe" metric naturally skew overall data. Furthermore they are locked into an AIDA way of thinking so have a skew towards one of the conscious attributes, be it brand awareness or direct response. It is therefore incredibly difficult to do real-world tests as brands are often reluctant to do a single TV campaign, followed by a single online campaign, further followed by a combined campaign, and compare data for example. This is made more difficult with the multi-disciplinary approach shown in online marketing from search to display to social media.

One attempt to understand the effects of the effects singularly and plurally is by looking at one of the natural senses in isolation. Paul Johnson-Rogers in discussions around audio branding, suggest 'applied music' has for centuries been used to 'control, manipulate or influence; to march soldiers into mortal peril, to scare the living daylight out of film audiences, or to make them cry.' His preliminary research into advertising jingles reveals that sonic branding alone is not enough for people to recall 'exact' brands, just the categories associated with them, e.g. the four-note 'Intel Inside' theme is more strongly associated with Microsoft than with Intel. He argues, however that 'music can certainly influence a customer's purchasing decisions while shopping. In one well-known

¹¹⁰ Strong, E. K. Jr. *Theories of Selling*. Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 9, No. 1. 1925. pp. 75-86

¹¹¹ Information gleaned from: <http://drypen.in/advertising/dagmar-defining-advertising-goals-for-measured-advertising-results.html>

¹¹² Packard, Vance. *The Hidden Persuaders*. 1957, reprinted in 1985. PocketBooks (MM)

¹¹³ *Supra* note 86

experiment, sales of wine were substantially affected by the playing of French and German music on alternate days.¹¹⁴

Johnson-Rogers is touching on mnemonics; derived from the Greek μνημα *mnema* or ‘remembrance’ – literally the art of memory.¹¹⁵ In foreign language learning, ‘keyword mnemonics’ are used by building a phrase in the learner’s natural language around the new word to learn, e.g. the linguist Michel Thomas taught students to remember that *estar* is the Spanish word for *to be* by using the phrase “to be a star.”¹¹⁶

Another of the ancients, the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BCE) is widely quoted in terms of Experiential Learning Cycles such as those portrayed by Dewey and Kolb. Confucius is credited at having said; “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.”¹¹⁷

This mnemonics in terms of combing multiple senses is a key way for learning through experience. Of the key natural senses, sight is considered the key sense, making up 75% of our basic learning. Hearing is the second largest contributor, with touch, taste and smell divided equally amongst the remaining graph.¹¹⁸ The visual dominates and the combination of sight and sound is overwhelming, however it is divided among experts as to their overall effect¹¹⁹, depending upon the task at hand – spatial or temporal.¹²⁰

What is known is that the blending and overlap of natural senses helps us learn and perceive our surroundings better. Scientists from the University of Montreal recently demonstrated that electrical stimulation of a body part (such as the leg) which normally would not be perceived was only felt when it was simultaneously accompanied by a visual or auditory signal.¹²¹

“The sense of touch, while important in itself, becomes a major learning factor when combined with other senses. Children do not associate the word “hot” with anything in

¹¹⁴ Johnson-Rogers, Paul. *Audio Branding*. 25 June 2009. Available at: <http://the-musictech.blogspot.com/2009/06/audio-branding.html>

¹¹⁵ Liddell, H. G.; R. Scott (1889). *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

¹¹⁶ Information gleaned at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mnemonic>

¹¹⁷ *Supra* note 99

¹¹⁸ US Naval Education & Training Command. *Navy Instructor Manual*. August 1992, p. 25. Available at: <http://www.mysdcc.sdccd.edu/NAVEDTRA%20134.pdf>

¹¹⁹ Strösslin, T., Krebsler, C., Angelo Arleo, A., Gerstner, W. *Combining Multimodal Sensory Input for Spatial Learning*. January 2002. Lecture Notes in Computer Science. Vol. 2415/2002. Springer Berlin. Available at: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/883wg53ab230naut>

¹²⁰ Wada, Y., Kitagawab, N., Noguchia, K. *Audio-visual integration in temporal perception*. International Journal of Psychophysiology, Vol. 50, Issues 1-2, October 2003, pp. 117-124. Available at: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8760\(03\)00128-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0167-8760(03)00128-4)

¹²¹ Lugo, J.E., Doti, R., Wittich, W. & Faubert, J. *Multisensory Integration: Central Processing Modifies Peripheral Systems*. October 2008. *Psychological Science*. Excerpt available at: <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/11/081112194925.htm>

*particular until they associate the word with their sense of touch. Through experience, we become sensitive to temperature, pressure, and the overall feel of things.*¹²²

This is a radically recent break away from the ‘reductionist’ thinking plaguing science until the start of this century that saw that a complex system was nothing more than the sum of or interaction of its individual parts. This view was popularized by Descartes who saw the world as mechanical, and therefore able to be broken down into segments.¹²³ This ‘unimodal’ approach also swayed all cognitive neurophysiological research.

Current neurophysiology and investigations into the sensory part of the brain, *superior colliculus*, led to the publication of ‘The merging of the Senses’ in 1993 by Barry Stein and Alex Meredith and is considered to be the groundbreaking work in the modern field of multisensory integration. Their studies show how the brain assembles information from the different sensory modalities; such as sight, sound and touch, for instance, in order to produce a coherent view of the external world and how these are integrated by the nervous system. In illustrating how sensory inputs converge, they in part focus on the ‘principle of totality’ that moves back towards Gestalt ‘whole form’ psychology.¹²⁴

A recent school of thought attacks the age-old concept of mass-media that still targets broad customer groups with reach and frequency vehicles that compartmentalises media channels or siloed AIDA theories. This concept stands in opposition to earlier reductionist ‘unimodel’ theories and is shift towards trying to take advertising out of a blanket scatter-gun approach to a more calculated and targeted model – that is more focussed on customer intimacy – based around ‘personas’. One suggestion is to break away from campaign-based marketing around ‘events’ and see a more holistic view through unified data. ‘Life-cycle marketing’ is about profiling a customer’s relationships with a company or brand over time in order for marketers to reach them more effectively.¹²⁵ This seems in keeping with modern neurophysiology thinking.

From an advertising perspective in regards to ‘retention’ and sensory learning it has been estimated that people retain only 10 percent of what they read, 20 percent of what they hear, and 30 percent of what they see. This, for example, could be argued is the level of print, radio and outdoor. However by combining senses for a multimodal approach, retention can be increased. When someone hears and sees, retention jumps to 50 percent and this backs the argument for the power of audiovisual media, such as television and cinema. By stimulating thinking and getting people to utilize more of their senses, such as touch, retention can be increased to between 70 and 90

¹²² *Supra* note 118

¹²³ Smith, Gerald L. *On Reductionism*. 1994. Sewanee, Tennessee. Available at: <http://smith2.sewanee.edu/texts/Ecology/OnReductionism.html>

¹²⁴ Stein, B. E.; Meredith, M. A. *The Merging of the Senses*. The MIT Press. January 1993. ISBN 0-262-19331-0

¹²⁵ Bradner, Lisa. *Realizing The Life-Cycle Marketing Vision*. 19 March 2006. Available at: <http://www.forrester.com/Research/Document/Excerpt/0,7211,41214,00.html>

percent.¹²⁶ This suggests that interactive and immersive media, from game playing to social media and content creation or interactive display media, where a user can ‘touch’ and explore the product in question, has a potential ability to uplift brand recall over other media and of significant interest.

Therefore the change in perception for consumer sought by branding can increase when a user is fully immersed with the product exploration, which can be enhanced in part by digital media and certainly by a full media spectrum, such as transmedia storytelling.¹²⁷ By the same token we cannot isolate metrics singularly, neither reduce them to a pure response based aggregated measurement for display media that signifies ‘intent’ in terms of a purchase consideration, which is what the ‘click’ is currently mistaken for in many cases when discussing ROI.

Proposed Consumer Life-Cycle

With the visual aspects being so dominant, we must break all advertising, including digital advertising, into two separate components; what they user sees, then what the user does. This ‘seeing’ is in essence what metrics like GRP try to define, i.e. a framework for the value of someone being exposed to a creative message.¹²⁸ This is beyond mere reach and frequency, as they alone have no basis of value to the advertiser as offer neither a positive or negative correlation of the exposure towards actual intent – and neither has the ‘click’ in isolation.

A proposed model for understanding I have begun to presented conferences in the UK and the US¹²⁹ is illustrated in *Figure 1*. The process is based on the fact modern consumer behaviour incorporating marketing and sales aspects is actually circular and not a funnel at all. Taking a five-step notion of ‘awareness-consideration-evaluation-purchase-retention’ there are a number of concentric circles happening within this process, and in fact the overall process is in itself a circle within a continued circular cycle (not specifically shown for simplicity of diagram) , which has been exasperated by the digital consumer shift.

Getting a potential customer's attention, teaching them what you have to offer, turning them into a paying customer, and then keeping them as a loyal customer whose satisfaction with the product or service urges other customers to join the cycle; as well as the potential up-sell of associated or enhanced products, e.g. upgrading an existing Apple iPhone to a newer model, or buying matching Gucci handbag for the Gucci shoes.

For the purpose of this document, I am going to reduce this down to a merely digital exposure. Yet I am taking the premise that any exposure to an ad in any media channel, and the combination of

¹²⁶ *Supra* note 118

¹²⁷ *Supra* note 93

¹²⁸ Information gleaned from: <http://www.nielsen-online.com/blog/tag/gross-rating-point/>

¹²⁹ Luechtefeld, L. *Why it's not the click that counts*. 28 May 2009. iMedia Connection coverage of Dean Donaldson, Eyeblaster. Available at: <http://www.imediaconnection.com/summits/coverage/23189.asp>

such over a number of frequencies, will generally push a consumer through a similar cycle of behavior; equally understanding that exposure to advertising is not the only form of 'awareness'. In this overall regard a Gestalt psychological theory of totality and multimodal neurophysiology can be called upon as reference models, as well as Kolb's understanding of concentric circles of continual learning, in order to move beyond a more simplistic AIDA funnel for advertising.

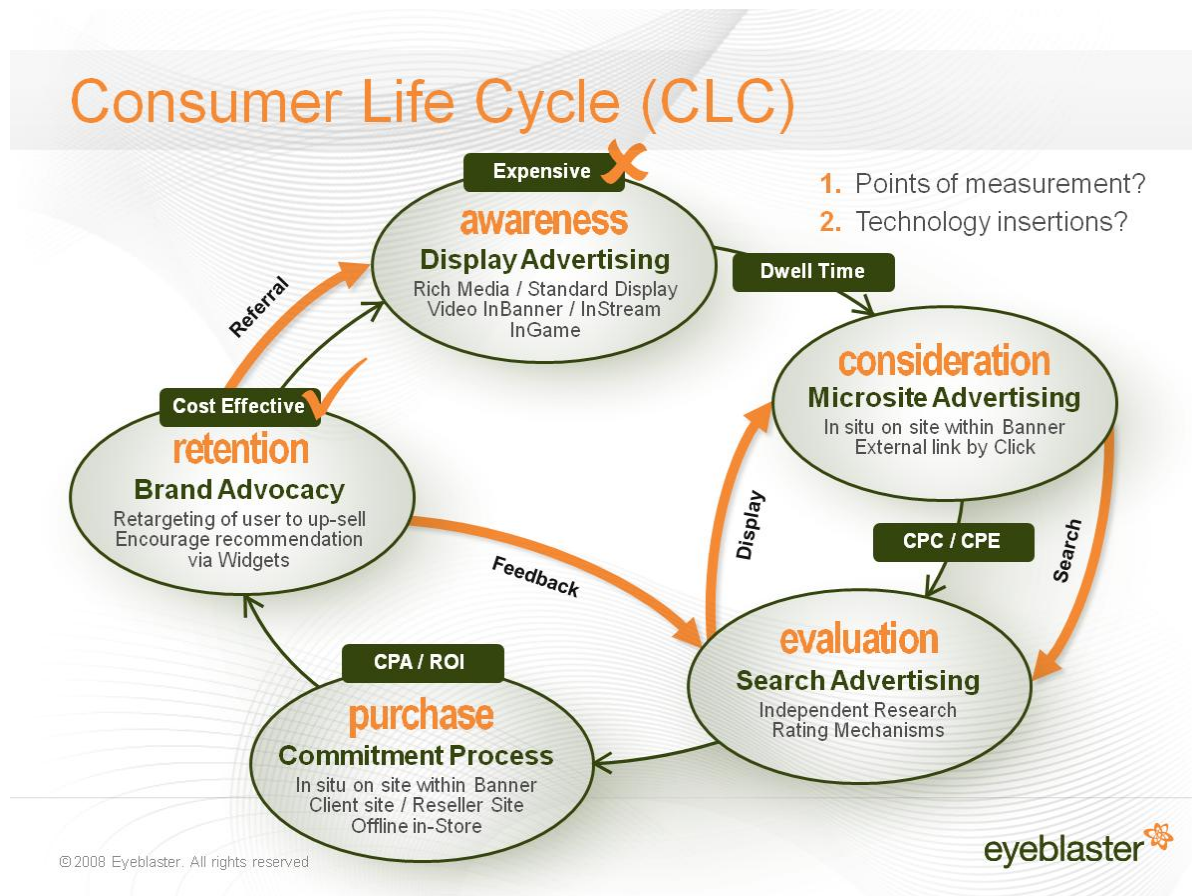


Figure 1 – Modern Consumer Life Cycle

If consumers are seeing ads, what do they do? Do they click, maybe but highly doubtful. Do they interact, quite possibly, though a small yet significant percentage. Does it prompt them to search? More than likely – and continue to do so until opinions are formed. Where do they convert – on client site direct or on an affiliate such as eBay or Amazon or in a bricks-and-mortar store? I do not think digital behavior should be any different from traditional behavior and the value of brand to inquiry to purchase can be represented as display to search to conversion, across media channels (e.g. PC to Laptop, Outdoor to Mobile)¹³⁰ without the necessary need of a display click.

¹³⁰ TNS / Eyeblander Research study: *The Digital Horizon*. June 2009. Available at: http://www.eyeblander.com/Forms/EB_Research/form.html

Key steps in this model:

Awareness: Display advertising in any media channel is there to raise the interest (alongside PR).

This is bringing something into the conscious mind of the consumer, and needs repetition of exposure for key touch-points or sound-bites to form. It also requires time. It also overlaps with exposure to the product (product in store/car on road, for example). The multiplicity of exposure in different forms and guises, with a single consistent theme allows the consumer to find mental 'pegs' to hang the following stages on. It is focussed on impact and desire.

- Modern PR 2.0 is in the form of online referral – we will get to that. Except multiple forms of product/brand exposure.
- Click is *not* relevant here. Need to look at did they see, how many times and for how long?

Consideration: This could happen by form of exploration within the advert itself, or any interactive device, or externally on an advertiser's site (modern product literature). The consumer is beginning to form a conscious opinion at this stage by discovering features and applying their relevance to their lifestyle.

- Only at this stage is click relevant, but secondary to interaction. This because there is a conscious decision to move forward with investigating.
- Click may not be an immediate decision, but something that develops over time. Information is ingested, and then placed upon 'pegs' forming in someone's mind. They remember key parts of certain attributes – such as product name – and that is what they search for.

Evaluation: A consumer needs to take information from many sources beyond the mere advertiser's features/benefits and will look to peers as a trusted source of information, or seek out independent reviews through consumer blogs and comparison sites, (started by Amazon). Only upon a successful completion of this process, which is circular in itself, is a consumer ready to move forward.

- The key point to note is that display / search represent a two-way conversation between advertiser and consumer and offers a potential targeting aspect currently not being implemented.
- The conversation based around questions such as 'it safe for kids, does it come in red?' Questions that could be answered in part by the relevant display ad in key placements to enforce a confidence against the consumer content seeking to answer these questions.

Purchase: The ultimate key moment and tangible measurement. For many advertisers relatively little may be actually sold online, and if so majority of transactions may happen at resellers. For example, unlikely to purchase Pantene shampoo online and Sony TV's are mostly sold through resellers as opposed to SonyStyle.

- Any conversions not happening direct on client site cannot simply be overlooked, as the previous steps are all still driving to this point of tangability. Doing so skews ROI data.
- TV display media can drive online purchase (through search and investigation). Online can drive offline purchase, for example.¹³¹

Retention: This is where the funnel model is broken. A key aspect of any brand in establishing the consumer as an advocate; partly for them to be up-sold and remain brand loyal and partly for them to influence their peers – whether on a personal level between friends and family, using David Beckham endorsing Gillette, or using a trusted source such as ‘now for the science bit’. In this regard the advocacy is influencing the awareness factor and cannot be separated, such as a funnel suggests.

- Firstly there is a word-of-mouth recommendation to friends, especially if price or quality is an issue.
- Secondly they are now feeding back into the ‘consideration’ aspects as people give product feedback to searchers, which are seen as valuable independent opinion.

Value proposition:

- Display media is the most expensive and least accurately accountable of media currently.
- This word-of-mouth is the most cost-effective aspect, but also most difficult to manage and analyze, although attempts can be made through ‘buzz’ metrics, such as those offered by Nielsen.¹³²
- Clicks are more natural in active investigation rather than in mere awareness – therefore search over display.
- New ways of measuring display are therefore needed to reveal whether a consumer has ‘noticed’ the advert within the exposure as opposed to mere effects after the exposure, i.e. post-view, search, etc.

It is against this backdrop of multiplicity of exposures and resulting responses, against the unconscious/subconscious, passive/active a new metric can be explored at the point of moving beyond the visual to a combine a multisensory participation with the brand and this is centred around “time”; the number of times and the amount of time.

¹³¹ *Supra* note 84

¹³² For information see: http://www.nielsen-online.com/products.jsp?section=pro_buzz

Dwell Time

The rise of Dwell Time

DoubleClick makes reference to 'Time Spent' in discussions surrounding Interaction Rate,¹³³ and according to published research following a change in its counting methodology in 2008 makes reference to "Average Interaction Time," however it is unclear as to whether it is counting all non-interacted ads within this average, drastically skewing the results.¹³⁴ This is actually true of all ad serving vendors. Eyeblaster had several time based metrics; Ad duration – the time an ad is on screen, Interaction Time – measured as continuous physical mouse-movement, Video Duration – length of time video was played, Panel Duration – length of time an expandable panel is open.¹³⁵

The non-ability to suitably compare all display adverts, irrespective of the content contained therein, i.e. video or expansions against non-expanding formats, proved problematic. Ad duration and the resulting time of exposure said nothing of any user connection with the media, and to this day remains difficult as it is near impossible to specify which ad formats appear above or below the 'fold', i.e. first screen display prior to scrolling. Interaction time of a non-moving mouse, such as when watching video, ensures a non-representative view of total time of ad engagement.

For all these issues with online display, there is currently no in situation measurement per ad exposure in any other display media, whether press, outdoor or television – falling back on panel groups. Whether someone 'saw' the advert has not seemed to be a requirement in display media previously. I expect this non-accountability to change as greater ROI is sought.

In discussions with media and creative agency personnel during the Summer of 2006, one of the metrics that came to light in discussions about website evaluation beyond the click, was centred around time. The number of visitors, how long they spent per page and in total, as well as the journey with the site. It was this basis of breaking what did the consumer see, and then what did they do. It was also a shift to placing the consumer in the centre of metrics, not an ambiguous 'page hit' or its online advertising counterpart, impressions. The discussion around consumer-centric measurement; how many times and the length of time a consumer was exposed to a message was discussed with David Hompe, Group Media Director, Isobar. The term *Dwell Time* was referenced in relation to the amount of time a user would dwell, or remain, on a site or within an ad unit.

¹³³ Story, Louise. *Forgive Me, Viewer, for I Have Confessed in a Banner Ad*. 10 February 2007. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/10/business/10doubleclick.html>

¹³⁴ *Supra* note 37

¹³⁵ Example data benchmarks available at: http://www.eyeblaster.com/Data/Uploads/ResourceLibrary/NA_Q307_Q208_benchmarks.pdf

Internal discussions at Eyeblander between the Research Analysis and Product teams came to bear based on finding a more suitable cross media metric for display, especially for global advertisers, who were struggling to compare media across a plethora of publisher environments around the globe that were getting a variety of results across multiple creatives.¹³⁶

Ad duration	Ad duration rate	Interaction duration	Interaction duration rate	Panels Viewed	Panels Viewed rate	panel1	panel1 rate	panel1 duration	panel1 duration rate
49	0.0007	3	0	5188	0.0752	7497	0.1086	20	0.0003
49	0.0007	3	0	5188	0.0752	7497	0.1086	20	0.0003
54	0.0028	3	0.0002	2402	0.1238	3678	0.1896	19	0.001
52	0.009	2	0.0003	733	0.1263	1156	0.1991	17	0.0029
54	0.004	3	0.0002	1669	0.1227	2522	0.1855	20	0.0015
50	0.0112	3	0.0007	541	0.1212	788	0.1765	29	0.0065
54	1.5	7	0.1944	16	0.4444	25	0.6944	124	3.4444
50	0.0113	3	0.0007	525	0.1185	763	0.1723	24	0.0054
50	0.0112	3	0.0007	541	0.1212	788	0.1765	29	0.0065
54	0.9167	7	0.1111	16	0.4444	25	0.6944	124	0.2222
50	0.9153	3	0.0271	525	0.1185	763	0.1723	24	0.0377

Figure 2 – Historic Campaign Data revealing floors in Interaction measurement

In Figure 2, the question of relationship between ‘Interaction Duration’, ‘Panel Duration’ and ‘Ad Duration’ reveals two anomalies; at first glance (red) that the expansion panel is open longer than the total time interacting with the ad – when rolling out of a panel would close the ad and stop the timer. Secondly, (blue) that someone is interacting with an ad longer than an ad is actually on a page. Both of which are seemingly impossible, and suggest discrediting the data, and thereby prove it difficult to measure multiple creative’s.

The data is accurate, since these are average numbers (not totals) per day, and the results are considered ‘reasonable’. For example, on a certain day there were 100 impressions for an ad. The duration of 90 of these impressions was around 10 seconds per each, while none of these 90 users rolled-over to see the panel. The duration of 10 of these impressions was around 60 seconds per each, while all these users also saw the panel for 40 seconds. The total calculation of the duration parameters for that day would be the following:

- Ad Duration: $(90 \cdot 10 + 10 \cdot 60) / 100 = 15$
- Panel Duration: $(10 \cdot 40) / 10 = 40$

Panel Duration offered the most reasonable basis for ‘Dwell Time’. In specific components of a creative, these were averages based only on the number of times the panel was called and for how long it remained open, as opposed to basing the number against the total number of impressions, i.e. it was shifting towards grouped consumer behaviour as opposed to ethereal impression values.

¹³⁶ Information based on internal Eyeblander email threads prior to September 2006.

Methodology

In the previous equation, a new metric 'Dwell Time' needed to strip out the 90% exposed and did not interact and leave the 10% that did interact. This would in turn would give; the number of impressions that were touched (Dwell Rate), and for how long (Dwell Time).

"Whether a mouse 'constantly' moves over a banner is far secondary to the length of time a user physically engaged with a piece of creative, irrespective of whether they clicked through or not – especially as clicks are in decline. Our Interaction rates are creative dependant on number of user action points, and vary wildly, so we have no way of judging overall campaign success. Hence we need Dwell Time - i.e. from mouse-over to mouse-off advert irrespective of format – the actual time a user interacts with the ad."¹³⁷

The data also had to be concatenated across all possible interaction points; multiple panels, videos, games or simple animations. If a mouse-event triggered a video, but the mouse-stopped whilst watching the video, the timer needed to keep running until the user is finished engaging. If a user rolled-out of a creative, then re-engages with the advert, the timer needed to be restarted. If a user rolled through an ad accidentally, the timer must wait 'a reasonable amount of time' before commencing the timer. Only if all conditions existed would we be closer to understanding 'active' consumer behaviour against any particular creative piece.

Due to scheduling implications for a change to the overall ad serving system, as well as needing conclusive test data to justify validity, a pilot "Dwell" metric was trialled for certain campaigns, most notably a Toshiba campaign created by Saatchi Interactive, running across Yahoo! Globally. Originally it was based on a timer function with the ad that sought to capture 'the number of seconds a mouse is over the ad regardless of whether the mouse is still or not'. It was done by attaching an interaction to a transparent button that was over the creative with start and end functions and added to all assets making up an ad. By adding all times together we were able to get a cumulative number of the time a mouse was above the ad.¹³⁸

A similar trial was set in place for a global Phillips campaign running across MSN, at the request of David Hompe, Isobar who had first expressed interest in the proposed metric. Debriefing from the creative agency, TribalDDB, contested as to the additional time a manual insertion of the timer took, especially when multiplied against multiple ads required for a global multi-lingual campaign.¹³⁹ The Dwell Time metric had proven successful, however, and showed its value and in May 2007 was proposed to enter the Product development cycle to be implemented across all campaigns.

¹³⁷ Email exchange between Dean Donaldson and Gal Triffon, CEO, Eyeblaster. 19 September, 2006.

¹³⁸ Notes from technical production of Toshiba ads, January 2007.

¹³⁹ Email exchange between Dean Donaldson and Nick Clements, Head of Advertising Development, Tribal DDB. 26 March 2007.

The nature of software development from defining enhancements, to scheduling programming and roll-out ensured the metric went into soft-release of BETA in February 2008. The purpose of the soft-release was to begin to collect data and test the robustness of the proposed metric across all campaigns before offering to global clients. From implementation against creative’s and allowing campaigns to run their course and analyse data is in itself a lengthy process. By June 2008 we had run several billion impressions across hundreds of campaigns and had our first global data-sets back to analyse.¹⁴⁰

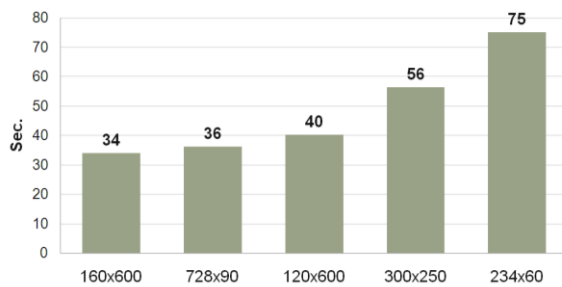


Figure 3 – Dwell Time Data per Format

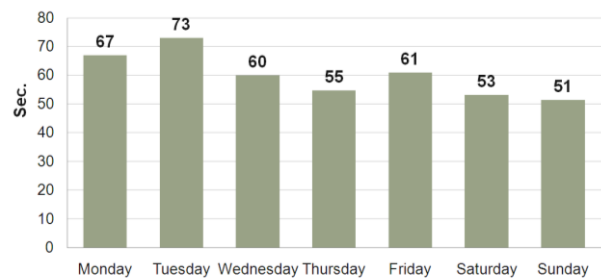


Figure 4 – Dwell Time Data per Day of Week

In *Figure 3*, we found that in comparison of ad format sizes, ads that appeared on desktop significantly outperform those that appear within a web page. This is to do with the amount of time an instant messenger application is open to the user compared to the length of time a user is on a web page. The resulting action initially suggests that a longer ad exposure is more likely to get someone to interact with an ad. However the ‘number’ of interactors is missing from this data set. *Figure 4* shows a ten-second higher lift during week-days (company time) then on weekends (personal time). However, in missing hourly data it is difficult to prove this summarise. What the data clearly points to, is that of those who have chosen to engage with a creative piece, they are doing so for significantly longer then the duration of an actual 30 second TV spot – double in fact – an average of one minute active interaction time, exploring the advertiser’s message. In order to express the value of this connection, we need to break out the video components of the ads from non-video ads.

The apparent significant increase of Dwell Time over Interaction Time (compare *Figures 3* and *4* (60 secs) against DoubleClick’s “Interaction Time” (10 secs) for example)¹⁴¹ is that Dwell Time is only focussed on the number of impressions that are actually touched or ‘consumed’ by some physical, touch-point and isolated from the remaining impressions that have no such tangibility. Although we

¹⁴⁰ First Dwell Time data set analysis, shown as grouped global data in *Figures 3* and *4*. Available as a download from: <http://www.eyebalster.com/Content.aspx?page=resource&id=45>

¹⁴¹ *Supra* note 38

accept that visual stimuli is a powerful emotive connector in the *superior colliculus*,¹⁴² and has an intrinsic value in brand recognition, the value of which can only be ascertained as a result of branding surveys or in terms of post-view, i.e. an appearance of the viewer of the ad upon an advertiser's website. If the viewer decides to search or go to a comparison site, such data is lost when analysed in silos. This is the concept of Dwell; to attempt to ascertain did a consumer 'see' an advert in a scalable single-metric, irrespective of what they 'do' as a subsequent behaviour. The nearest metric that is currently measurable in isolation is by a physical interaction.

Results

The preliminary research had demonstrated the robustness of the offering, and the metric was released to the global users of the Eyeblaster system in September 2008. A secondary study was scheduled to run from this moment over a six-month period, appreciating that quarterly figures may be skewed by particular events, such as Christmas. Allowing the data to run to the end of Q2 2009, data was gathered in April and begun to be analysed in order to discover various aspects of Dwell Time and how it relates to Clicks. This research uses isolated data from a sample size of 1.5 Billion rich media impressions spanning all formats and global regions. Where a sub-set of the data was utilized, it is highlighted as such.

Definition

Dwell Time as a definition is seen as 'the average number of seconds users intentionally spend engaging with an online ad.'¹⁴³ The metric sums up the following user actions: Amount of time the mouse was over an ad, user-initiated video duration, user-initiated expansion duration, and any other user-initiated custom Interaction duration.'¹⁴⁴

It is broken down into two key metrics;

- **Dwell Rate:** the cumulative instances of when a user interacts with the ad divided by served impressions.
- **Dwell Duration:** the time the users intentionally spends with the creative per exposure – it takes into account all instances where a user engages with the ad per exposure, measured in the total number of seconds, discounting the exposures that are not engaged with.

Key Highlights

Considering all formats, the average duration across all regions and verticals is **53.08** seconds with a rate of **8.71%**.

¹⁴² *Supra* note 124

¹⁴³ Unintentional dwell instances, lasting less than one second, are excluded.

¹⁴⁴ Dwell Time is currently going through a Patent Process via Eyeblaster – I am named as one of inventors

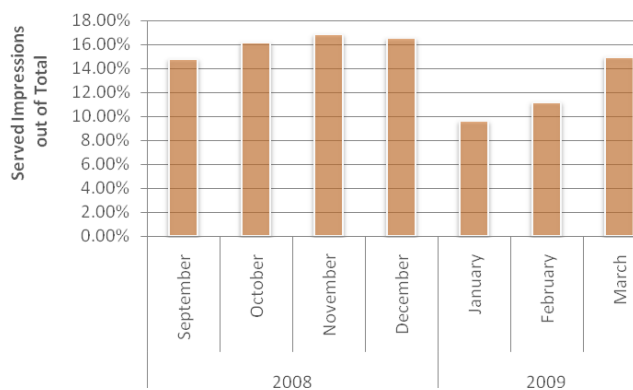
This is saying that of all ad impressions served, 8.71% of ad impressions are interacted with and of those that are; they are being played with for an average of 53.08 seconds. This is practically double the length of time of the average TV spot.

Breaking down those creative executions that may / may not include video:

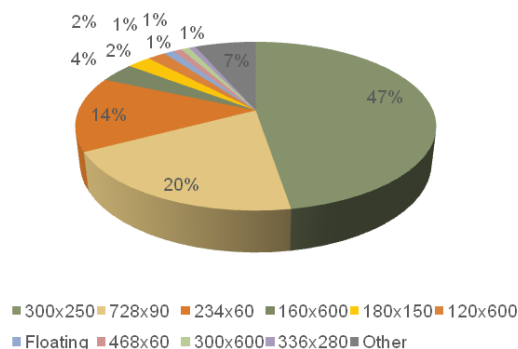
- With Video – duration is **71.51** sec with a rate of **10.04%**
- No video ads – duration is **37.37** sec with rate of **7.65%**

In essence video is both powerful at drawing people into an ad unit and as a result, practically doubles the length of duration the average user will tangibly interact with any given ad. This hereby shows that the average user is choosing to actively engage with a 30 second video clip in banners.

Breakdown of distribution of adverts over time



Breakdown of distribution across ad unit sizes



When we look at the breakdown of rich media by ad unit, what we discover is:

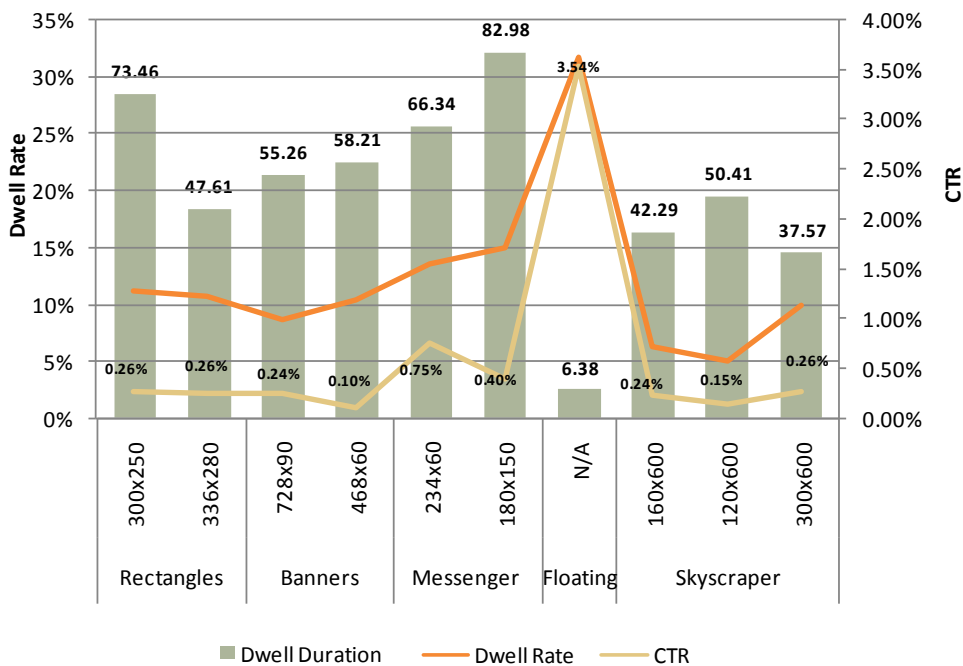
- Nearly half of all ads 48% are the rectangle format with majority of those being 300x250 format.
- A fifth of ads are horizontal banners, with large banners (728x90) making up 20% and only 1% now being the old banner format (468x60)

- Vertical Skyscrapers make up 7%, with majority of those now being the 160x600 format.
- 16% of all ads now served are within Desktop Messenger software (i.e. non web-browser based formats)

How is Dwell distributed?

In order to fully understand the impact of Dwell Time we must firstly compare the relationship between Dwell Time and its bearing on CTR across formats.

Distribution of Dwell across the ten most popular ad unit sizes



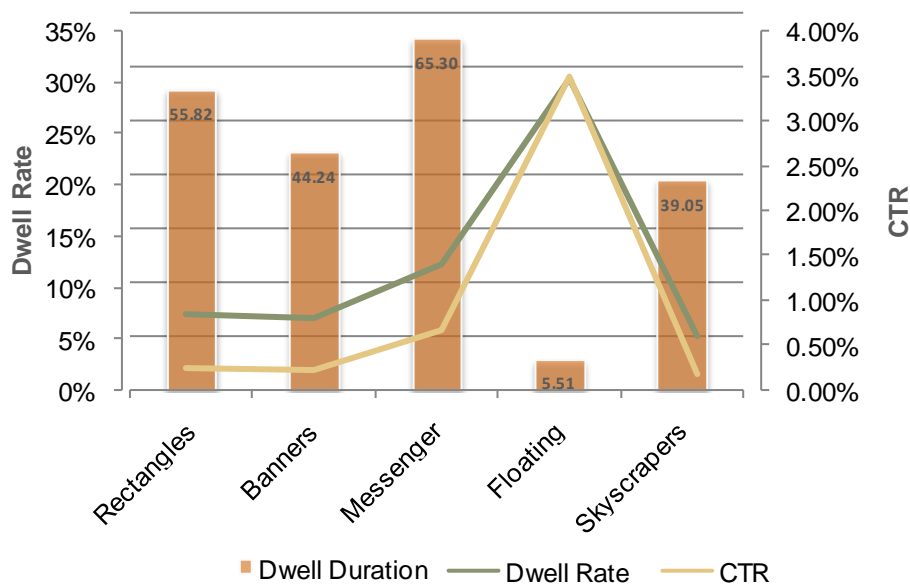
Looking at both Rate and Duration, the top performing formats are;

- Desktop formats;
 - 180x150 – mostly MSN Messenger Today – high rate, hi duration yet average clicks
 - 234x60 – the half-banner in MSN Messenger – high rate, high duration and high clicks.
- Browser-based formats;
 - 300x250 – the rectangle (MPU) – high rate, high duration & average clicks
 - 728x90 – the banners – average duration, average rate & average clicks
 - 120x600, 160x600, 300x600 – the skyscrapers – lowest duration time, low interactions until wide (300) format and low clicks
 - 468x 60 and 120x60 two original banner/skyscraper sizes – both achieving the lowest CTR, but the banner is achieving a Dwell Rate and average in length of time...

All formats are achieving longer engagement time then the average 30 sec TV spot.

Dwell Duration is not necessarily equating to shift in CTR, i.e. if someone plays with an ad longer they are not necessarily going to click-thru more, indicating they have found the “immediate” answers they need.

The Dwell Rate and CTR do have a level of consistency, i.e. the number of people who engage with an advert is relational to the click-ability, and is to do with the size/location of the advert on the page.



In grouping the ad formats together we see some other startling realities;

Firstly, that around 10% of all ads are interacted with compared to less than 0.3% clicked on. Based on 1,000 ad impressions served, this means less than 3 ads are clicked on vs. around 100 ads are being played with. This means you are 20x more likely to have a brand experience on a publisher site, then on an advertiser’s microsite.

Secondly, desktop ads are outperforming all browser-based ads, showing 12% (150% increase over browser-based formats ads) in Dwell Rate and a 10-20 second increase in Dwell duration. This is generally to do with the length of time the user is exposed to the ad, i.e. they are there exposed to the advert for longer (potentially all day) complemented by the potential auto-load of the software on machine restart. It is both increases likelihood to interact with and spend time with the brand.

This is balanced against adverts contained within a browser, say on a homepage, where the likelihood is the user would normally be there for a few seconds before leaving the page. A comparison could be drawn in terms of standing around a bus stop versus driving past a billboard in

terms of potential exposure time. However, once a consumer is engaged, they will spend a great amount of time exploring a brand – not just 30 seconds passively receiving a message like television.

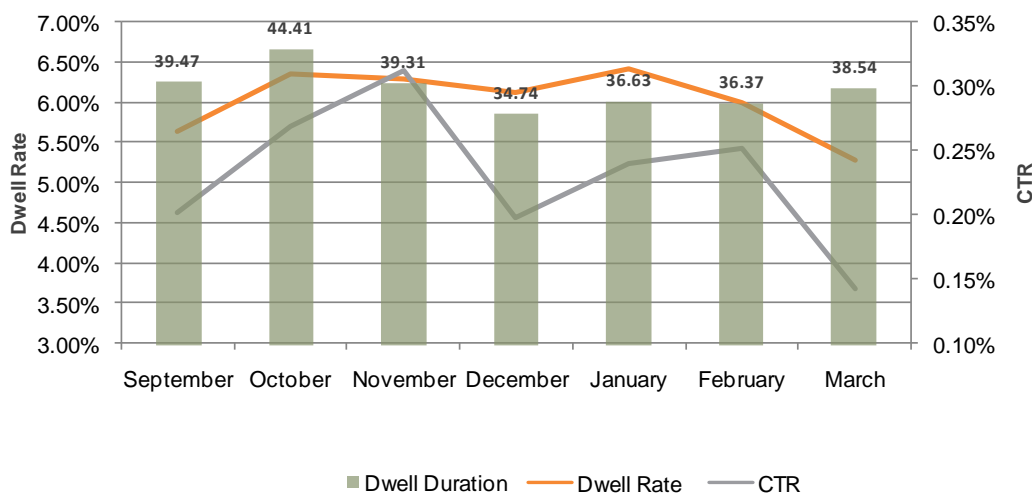
Floating ad reveals a massive 30% Dwell Rate. This is another interesting anomaly. The original concept of a floating ad was to serve well at getting the eye away from page content, intrusively into the ad space, and then allow users play around with the ad. Due to it being played automatically when least expected there is a high Dwell Rate and ultimately high click-thru. A criticism that resulted into shying away from the format has always been maintained of the annoyance and accidental interactions/clicks. Currently only seeing 1% of impressions use this ad as media buyers have feared adverse brand impact.

Dwell Time radically reverses this thinking. Evidence shows these ads are being interacted with for 6 seconds,¹⁴⁵ so this indicates that Floating ads are indeed a positive short-form interaction format! This is a startling reality that flies in the face of previous thinking of clicking in error – and hereby revealing an intrinsic value of Dwell Time. Floating ads show 6 seconds of Dwell Duration revealing users are playing with this format. If floating ads are having a negative brand effect, we would see zero dwell duration, indicating that floating ads are indeed a positive short-form interaction format. Although they make up a relatively small amount of all ad impressions now – the data reveals a potential need for a resurgence of this format, especially in the guise of a floating-expandable advert. This new data once again offers confidence to utilize some of this potential and ensure positivity through better creativity.

When is Dwell distributed?

Are there any seasonal variations on Dwell Time in relation to CTR and what about day-parting?

Distribution of Dwell per month

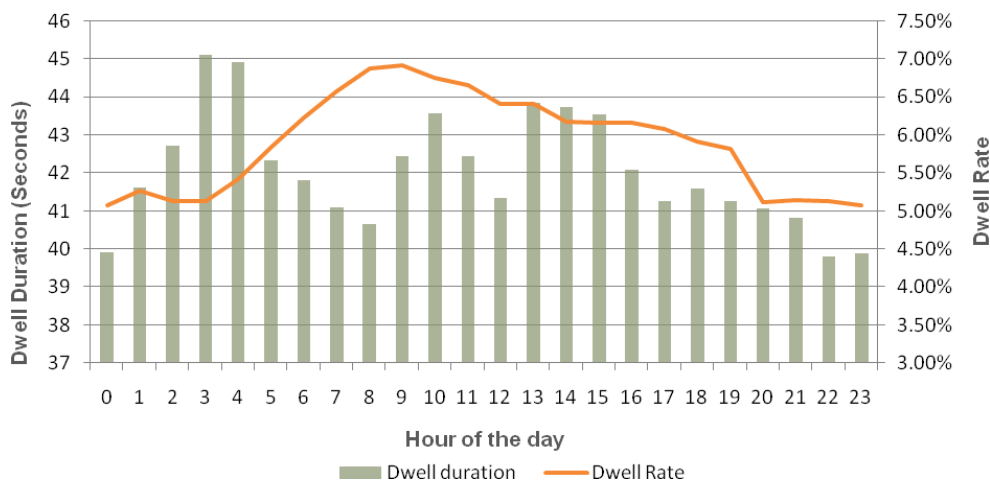


¹⁴⁵ The Duration in time is limited because generally these ads are designed to be on screen for minimum amount – they are short-form adverts, generally no more than 15 secs content and usually around 7 seconds.

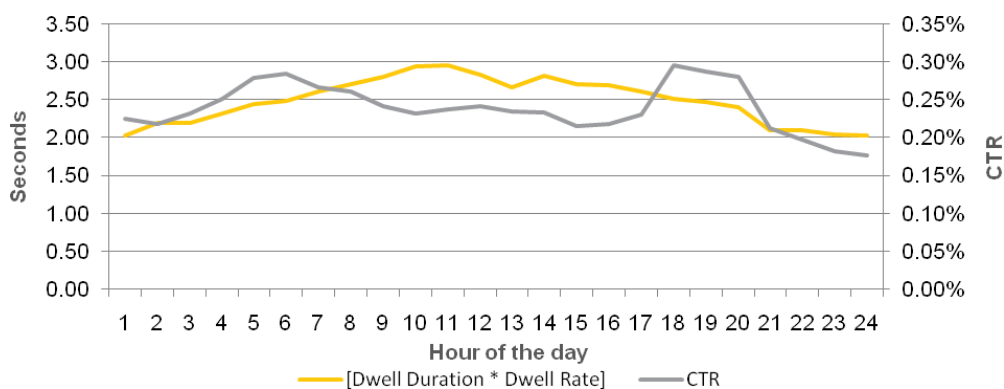
In looking at the data across the months since been tracking Dwell Time, we are seeing CTR at the highest around November indicating a response aspect prior to Christmas and the holiday season. However it is post-holiday in January we are seeing a jump in a number of users wishing to engage with a brand. Currently October seems to be pulling in the longest time people are prepared to explore a brand and December the least.

Resolution by Day Part

The data used here is taken from a three month sample size to end of 2008, spanning NA region EST time zone only. The data here is just focusing on browser-based ad formats.



Dwell rate is at its highest in the morning, peaking at 10am, when people are prepared to interact, but for not as long as they are at lunch-time when they generally play with ads for longer – a lift of nearly 2% and 5 seconds in time. Interestingly, we are seeing a spike for the insomniacs who are quite happy to play around for longer!

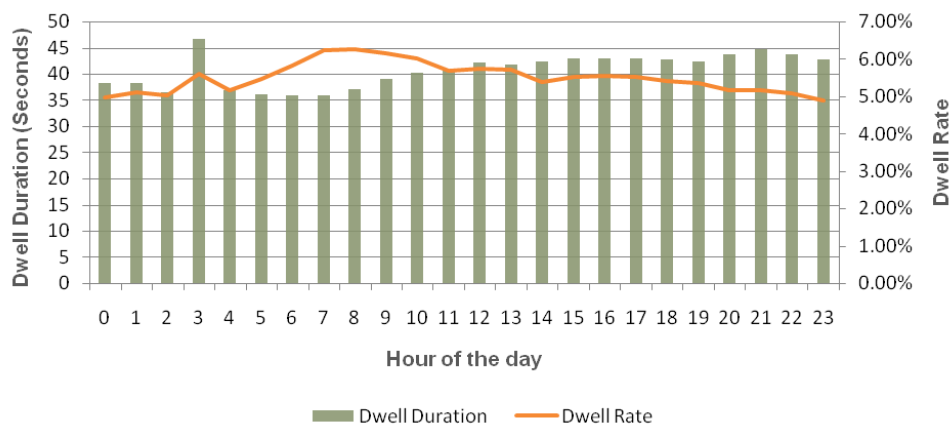


If we look at a Day-Parted Dwell Time, (i.e. by hours in a day) in comparison to Clicks, research indicates what consumers are doing and when. Using a ‘weighted’ Dwell – to bring the figures in comparison to Clicks (i.e. the combination of Dwell Rate and Dwell Duration measured against each

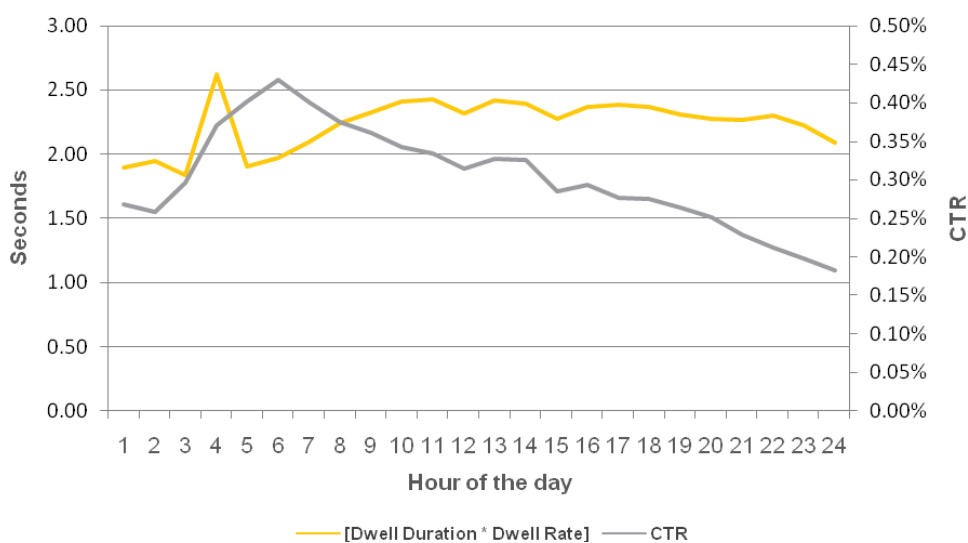
impression but not-excluding those who do not interact) – we are still seeing a peak in morning into lunch for people prepared to engage with and click on ads. This trend reverses in the evening, when time falls, but CTR peaks between 6-8pm, and again another spike in insomniac clickers.

This could equally be argued that branding aspects are more inclined to happen during the day, and response aspects occur in the evening hours. What this suggests is while people are at work and online, there is a natural position to help build a brand where TV cannot reach. In the evening, consumers engage across media channels. TV assists in building the brand, and the internet assists helping users look for further information.

Resolution over Weekend



In looking at data across the weekend period, there is no substantial change for Dwell rate of duration. It is kind of flat across the board.



Bring Clicks in alongside Weighted Dwell across the weekend, we are seeing clicks happening earlier in the morning, yet a consistent decline throughout the day, whilst engagement remains constant.

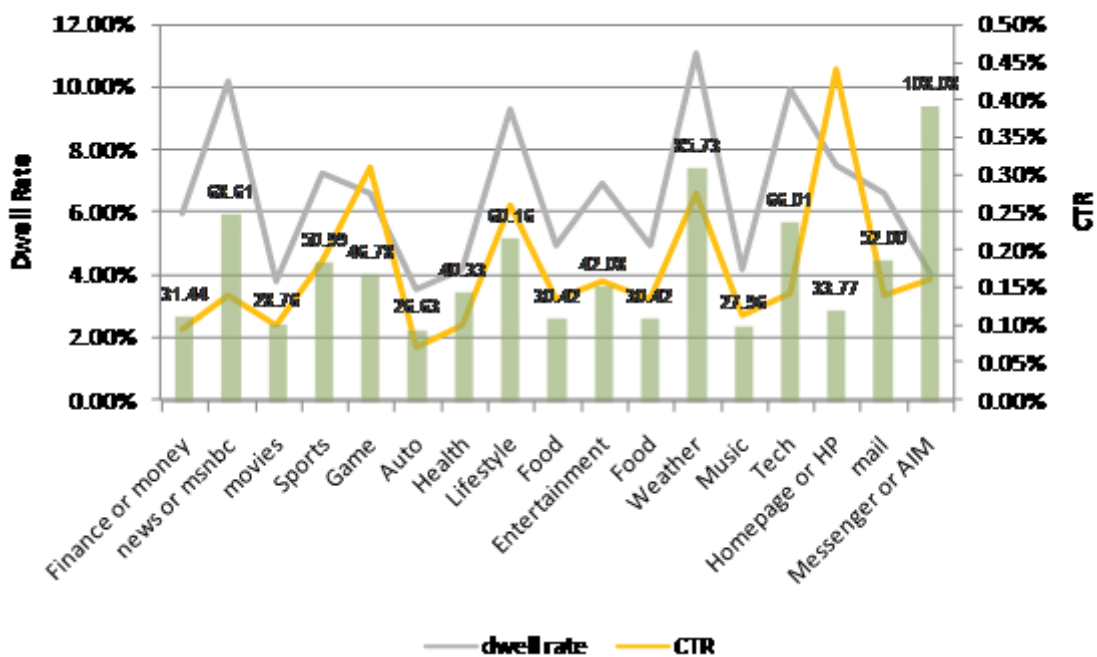
What is more startling is that Dwell Time in general is slightly lower at weekend, there is a sharp decline in CTR at weekends compared to the rest of the week.

Where is Dwell distributed?

In looking at distribution of Dwell, we are wishing to look at Publisher environments, Vertical and Geographical regions as well as break out the video components of Dwell within the overall statistics.

Distribution by Publisher Environment

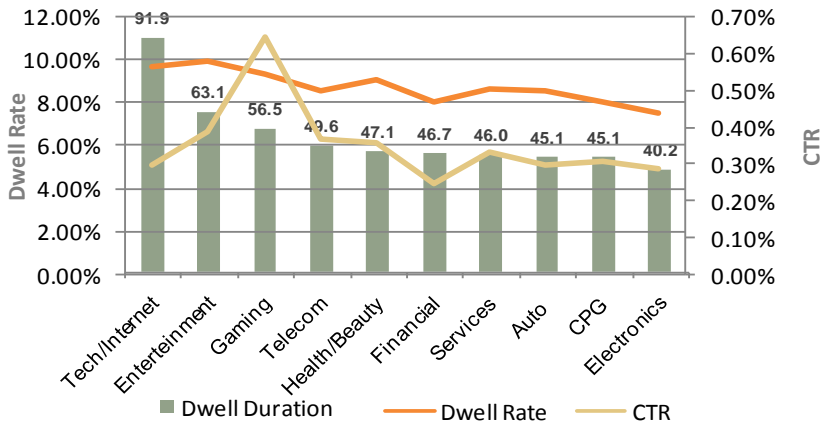
Looking at isolated data for NA market only from Q4 '08 and Q1 '09 covering the top 300 publishers.



What we discover is Dwell Duration is highest in a desktop environment followed by weather, technology and news. Weather is actually one of the highest performing sections across all metrics. Surprisingly movie and auto sections are actually some of the poorest performing areas across all metrics. In terms of Dwell Rate – weather, technology, news and lifestyle all attract a number of consumers to explore the advertiser’s message and produce comparatively high durations as a result.

The best performing areas for click-thru are in on the home-page. This may be due to the higher quality of creative on homepages designed to catch attention, although the time spend on a homepage is generally much less than any other section, as it is a jump-off page as opposed to a content page – therefore the low dwell duration here is in keeping with the content surroundings. The gaming, lifestyle and weather sections are also pulling higher click-thrus.

Distribution across the top-ten verticals

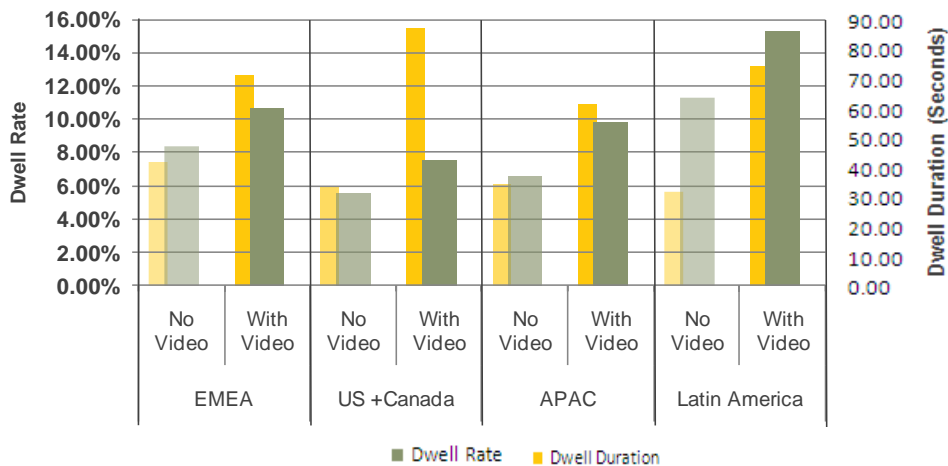


What is incredible is that the Technology and Internet sectors is almost double most other verticals, showing that users spend 91.9. Nearly 10% of all ads are engaged with for an average of one-and-half minutes. This shows a real willingness of Internet users to explore a sector that has direct bearing on their everyday experiences.

Both entertainment and gaming are the next best engaged sectors, both holding 55 seconds of Dwell duration, with gaming gaining a higher than average CTR as a result. However, although gaming shows a peak in CTR at 0.6%, this means that per every 1000 ad impressions served only six ads are being clicked on compared to 70 ads interacted with on an average of 56.5 seconds. Electronics seems to be the poorest in terms of Rate and Duration, coming in at about 35 seconds.

Distribution by Region

In the following data, desktop adverts were removed from the data source to ensure uniform comparisons across regions.



Highest Dwell Time of users prepared to play with ads is in US, however the Rate is the global lowest. In essence, people are not playing with ads as much in the US, but when they do, they are prepared to explore for longer.

		Dwell Rate	Dwell Duration
Global	General	8.71%	53.08
	No Video	7.65%	37.37
	With Video	10.04%	71.51
EMEA	General	9.75%	54.58
	No Video	8.41%	40.93
	With Video	10.65%	69.54
US +Canada	General	6.54%	57.58
	No Video	5.56%	32.73
	With Video	7.53%	85.16
APAC	General	7.31%	41.86
	No Video	6.55%	33.51
	With Video	9.80%	59.94
Latin America	General	12.64%	50.85
	No Video	11.29%	31.02
	With Video	15.24%	72.33

Americans are the least likely to engage with online ads, but when they do engage, U.S. consumers spend far more time with the ad than in other markets, especially if they contain video. In the U.S., Dwell time shows that the average time spent with a video ad is 85 seconds indicating North America leads the world in Dwell Duration. It would appear from the data that there is more resistance on behalf of the consumer in the US than in EMEA or APAC – which suggest in this more developed region, consumers have been over-saturated with online ad formats and. This in turn has been complemented with greater brand or publisher restrictions as a result of the negativity afforded by original pop-ups of early days.

The data suggests that it is not so much shape or size or clicks that we need to address – but a potential consumer complacency, especially where the most interesting creativity is often hidden post-click; either click-to-expand or click-to-microsite. This means that US designers need to work that much harder on ad creativity to get people engaged from the outset. But the potential pay-off is once they have got them engaged, American people really want to explore brands right where they are on the page.

The argument for creativity can be seen in the inclusion of video – as it both increases the rate of engagement and duration in time. Considering the power of television to develop stories that create brand recall, what we are seeing here is that video is both powerful at drawing eye off page content and then in holding the users attention – double other ad concepts or in the case of the US, practically triple the Dwell Duration.

With a move to online inStream video ads it is worth noting that there is a shift towards 15 second InStream ads due to their intrusiveness, yet in banner video is having the opposite effect. InStream ads are following television, they are purely linear stories and it is very much about reach, and generally for half as long as TV ads. However in Banner video is very much about engagement complementing reach – and consumers are prepared to spend at least twice as long as TV ads actively exploring a brand.

Regionally and globally the contribution of video cannot be ignored; *Rather than click away, users want to stay and play!*

Case Studies

In terms of case studies; Hewlett-Packard in the US ran a campaign for their TouchSmart technology. The ad ran and achieved staggering two-minutes of Dwell Time. As a result a subsequent campaign was run with a significantly higher number of impressions – revealing client confidence in the metric. Warner Bros Europe have now decided to no longer measure click-thru as an indication of campaign success, especially when video views are more natural to their industry sector. Dwell Time has offered the greatest confidence in proving campaign success of engagement, alongside buzz metrics.¹⁴⁶ In Asia too, L’Oreal achieved a staggering two-minutes Dwell Time in an email environment and three-minutes on a homepage!¹⁴⁷ The evidence for campaigns around the world is concluding that Dwell Time is a powerful indicator of brand engagement.

Adapting to Criticism

On 20th April 2009, at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York at an IAB conference on video, I presented the original findings of Dwell Time in a series of presentations where I argued that in terms of video, the power of which cannot be argued in driving clicks, but in terms of emotional connections. The measurement of this ‘brand value’ could be measured in part by Dwell Time. This was picked up by a subsequent panel (which I was not on) who saw intrinsic value of Dwell Time yet raised a criticism as a true measurement of branding in the fact it cannot measure consumer perception changes such as those done with a panel exposure offered by Dynamic Logic.¹⁴⁸

To that I have two comments; the first online panels can be loaded in their own right, for example a particular ‘type’ can tend to fill in online surveys therefore not giving true representation of the brand. Neither are these studies scalable for every online campaign due to their cost, and in absence of such insights, a metric is needed to justify online exposure. Secondly the resulting action of

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Kelly Bennett, Director, New Media & Interactive Marketing, Warner Bros. Pictures International. 8 May 2009.

¹⁴⁷ Case Study available at: <http://www.eyebalster.com/Content.aspx?page=resource&id=71>

¹⁴⁸ Panel discussion ‘Is this thing working?: What Effective Video Advertising Looks Like in a New Media Landscape’. Agenda available at: http://www.iab.net/events_training/digitalvideo2009/agenda

someone engaging with a creative cannot be answered in isolation within a creative piece. In this regard I point back to my consumer life-cycle, *Figure 1*. Dwell Time is based on the percentage of consumers who ‘actively see’ a brands message. It does not address those who ‘passively see’ a message, nor any resulting change. The assumption is drawn in the fact if someone takes time to explore a message there has to be a positive connection from a consumer to the brand. The value of which, needs to be ascertained through further research.

A month later on 20th May, 2009 a press event was scheduled with reporters from DM News, AdWeek, Wired and AdAge in New York to give a first glance summary of global findings.¹⁴⁹ The discussions of the evening turned to the thought of how advertising online was being incorrectly designed due to incorrect measurement. By offering a more correct analysis or single point of measurement that could be adapted by the industry, would help falling CPM’s stabilise and give marketers confidence in digital advertising per se – or release creativity akin to offline advertising, with added benefits afforded by active participation from the consumer.

Taking a wider discussion about online advertising in general and the skewed data thinking, Brian Morrissey, Digital Editor, AdWeek blogged about *Dwell Time* in an article “Are designers to blame for bad Web ads?”¹⁵⁰ The article provoked comments and other blog posts, such as “In Defense of Banners.”¹⁵¹ Some of the comments raised questions by the readers, based on the premise of questioning ‘do online ads work or not’ and not having been exposed to the original research, I posted a response for them, “BadMen – mature thinking needed in Digital Advertising”¹⁵² on my own blog which summarised some of my thinking surrounding online creativity.

Frank Rose, Contributing Writer, Wired similarly blogged “Ad Sense? Googlenomics and the Tyranny of Click-Through,” and of *Dwell Time* stated “It’s not quite as cut-and-dried a measurement as click-through, but it gets a lot closer to the kind of user behavior that actually matters. Like whether or not anyone is paying attention.”¹⁵³ DM News equally posted an overview of our discussions in an article “Engagement metrics evolve beyond CTR along with Web display ad technologies.”¹⁵⁴ Which included a quote from Mitch Spolan, VP of North American field sales at Yahoo! who agrees looking at interaction as ‘time’ is very valuable for marketers;

¹⁴⁹ The document discussed is submitted in addition to this overview.

¹⁵⁰ Morrissey, Brian. *Are designers to blame for bad Web ads?* 21 May 2009. Available at: <http://bmorrissey.typepad.com/brianmorrissey/2009/05/are-designers-to-blame-for-bad-web-ads.html>

¹⁵¹ Robinson, Noah. *In Defense of Banners*. 21 May 2009. Available at: <http://noahrobinson.wordpress.com/2009/05/21/in-defense-of-banners/>

¹⁵² Donaldson, Dean. *BadMen – mature thinking needed in Digital Advertising*. 22 May 2009. Available at: <http://deandonaldson.wordpress.com/2009/05/22/badmen-%e2%80%93-mature-thinking-needed-in-digital-advertising/>

¹⁵³ *Supra* note 13

¹⁵⁴ Golia, Nathan. *Engagement metrics evolve beyond CTR along with Web display ad technologies*. 15 June 2009. Available at: <http://www.dmnews.com/Engagement-metrics-evolve-beyond-CTR-along-with-Web-display-ad-technologies/article/138596/>

“When you can run rich media — when you can mouse over an ad and watch a video or fill out a form — it's like a mini Web site delivered to the right user,” Spolan says. “It's not uncommon to have an interaction rate of 10% vs. a click-through rate of .10%. It's not like I can just get a click-through rate of point-two and everything will be OK — it's about making an impact for my business, and if I can design the display media in the right way and measure the time that I have people engaged one-on-one, that's a very powerful way to measure display media.”¹⁵⁵

In general there is a natural nervousness surrounding the concept of adapting to new metrics, yet from the variety of seminars and meetings I have been in, and from feedback from Eyeblander sales staff around the globe, there seems to be a welcome value of giving a tangible catch-all metric that offers an intrinsic value for digital display advertising – especially against traditional media. The length of duration modern consumers will spend engaging with a brand has staggered most people and offers new insights into how and why to develop online advertising, and gives a confidence in justifying budgets. It is widely accepted we have no knowledge of any kind of ‘engagement’ with any other media, offering some kind of way of showing a connection is seen as a distinctly positive step.

Beyond Dwell Time

The nature of Kolb’s theory of Experiential Learning for reviewing and implementing further change is equally valid for furthering Dwell Time. We need to look at the role of qualitative and quantitative research and trying to understand the human behaviour in digital advertising and its bearing on how to make better and greater campaigns that produce real, as opposed to assumed, success.

This takes two key directions;

In discussions with Dynamic Logic and Insight Express, the idea of such ethnographical studies, showing holistic appreciation of the value of Dwell Time in ascertaining impact in a consumer society at shifting perceptions. Does a longer active duration have an effect at changing brand perceptions then just a passive exposure? Can “marker points” in time be pulled from the system, for example a video stream, and these in turn be shown as impacting attitudinal shifts? What would be the difference in a brand perception after 5 seconds of video versus 30 seconds, for example?

Currently I am involved in discussions internally with our product team on the ability to measure “passive engagement” and not just “active engagement”. This would allow the circa 90% of ads not ‘touched’ to have some way of being measured through a resulting action and draws inspiration from Heath’s ‘Low Level Processing’.¹⁵⁶ In terms of understanding where Dwell sits currently;

¹⁵⁵ *Supra* note 154

¹⁵⁶ *Supra* note 71

- Those who see and ‘nothing’
- Those who see and are being reinforced by brands position
- Those who need to see multiple times before ‘something’
- Those who see and interact (*Active Dwell Time circa 10%*)
- Those who see and click (*0.1%*)
- Those who see and search (*30% clicks attributed to display exposure*)

Different channels like TV, Print, billboards, PC, Mobile, etc. present different measurements. Online channels specifically add to the confusion with myriad of interactions that are reported and prevent comparison. Currently Dwell Time provides a partial solution that helps compare online ads that include user interaction. However, since only a small percent of exposed user actually interact with an ad, the effect of passive exposure, that is the standard with all other branding channels, is lost. As a result the online comparison is limited and the comparison to offline channels becomes obsolete.

Ideally we need to discover the **total length of time** someone is seen to be "engaging with a creative" whether physically interacting, watching, etc. Dwell Time currently sits at a ‘per ad exposure’, not accumulated per campaign exposure, nor cross media campaign exposure. Therefore to fully determine the value of Dwell Time, we need to move to unique users, the number of times they see an ad (Frequency) and the total amount of time they have been exposed to a brand’s message (Dwell Time) – broken down both passively and actively – and then across the full media spectrum. This could therefore alter the value we currently place on metrics such as GRP, as we find a time based metric that can truly answer what a user ‘sees’ and then combine with Dynamic Logic studies, etc. to reveal the impact of cumulative time. Cross-channel metrics would assist in what the user then ‘does’ and this could be then based against Consumer Life-Cycles for particular industry sectors; 80 seconds of TV exposure + 15 seconds of Outdoor exposure = search on a mobile phone, for example.

- X% people spent Y seconds on average exposed per channel and cumulative total.
- 25% spend Y secs actively engaged
- 50% spend Y secs, passively aware, etc.
- After X views + Y cumulative time = Z response in this channel
 - o Repeat until overall desired achievement / measure cumulative effect as total

These buckets would determine values of various low level processes and resulting behaviours, in essence what did a consumer see and what did a consumer do – and measure the value of siloed-media buys and cross-media buys at determining effects, and allow greater ROI for media buys, especially when combined with behavioural targeting.

Conclusion

What advertisers want to know is “are users seeing my ads?” and unlike TV, Dwell Time can answer a definitive “yes they are” providing a key engagement measurement irrespective of click-thru. Marketers are far more excited to know that around 100 people spend more than a minute discovering their product or brand in an ad as opposed to 3 people that clicked on it. Online rich ads encourage consumers to engage with brands in more active, explorative ways. Marketers are shifting towards creating compelling interactive stories where consumers are, as opposed to driving traffic to micro-sites. Video is an obvious enhancement to any campaign, and a move towards interactive video should be seen as a priority for advertisers wishing to engage with consumers.

Dwell Time is a clear, reliable indicator of active brand engagement online and this is a key differentiator over television.

Dwell Time offers the greatest chance in bridging the online-offline debate for advertising measurement. It draws closer to a tangible measurement of branding campaigns, and indeed offers an assurance to maintain branding budgets in their own right, taking a holistic viewpoint of the entire consumer life-cycle. Reductionist theories of advertising assume ‘that the secret to closing a sale is simply a matter of putting the right message in front of the right target audience at the right time.’¹⁵⁷ This is clearly not the case and current online measurements have for too long tried to squeeze a square peg into a round hole, and this is shown by the lack of confidence in digital display.

The value of display media has been watered down, and worse the value of interactive media at establishing true brand engagement is being missed, by a quick ‘click-me’ fix. The multitude of reports and studies into cross-channel effects or multimodal connectivity, some of which I have highlighted, is being adopted *slowly* by the online fraternity – they are looking for a quick catch-all metric – and in times of recession the result is devaluing content by driving reduced CPMs. This will have a long-term detriment on consumers who are continually demanding higher quality entertainment in all media channels.

Dwell Time strikes a balance of a single metric that can be adopted readily, gives confidence to the online community to stand against other media from being both accountable and increased value over mere audio/visual media. It also draws closer to the type of measurement needed for all advertising media consumption and offers a potential gravitas to be adopted by other media channels as technology facilitates the ability to measure if someone is actively consuming advertising media in front of a billboard or television screen, for example.

¹⁵⁷ Fulgoni, Gian. *On Branding versus Direct Response*. 22 April 2009. Available at: <http://blog.tigglobal.com/?p=878>

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