



Improving Viewability

HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR
INVENTORIES' VIEWABILITY AT SCALE!



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Purpose and Context

'Viewability' is quite tricky. Even though the underlying principle seems simple (Viewable Ads drive better ROI and UX), it is hard for publishers to accept and endorse it at scale.

When you take a high-level view from the buy-side, your purpose is lucid. It might be to drive awareness or gain subscribers or improve conversions. At the end of the day, you try to buy a better inventory (programmatically) which can deliver acceptable viewability metrics as suggested by the MRC.

But for a publisher, 'Viewable Ad' doesn't just end with a straightforward solution. There are a ton more factors involved in delivering and maintaining viewable impressions. Starting from design to user interface changes, you as a publisher have to analyze and account many distinct factors while working on 'Viewability'.

Besides, focusing solely on viewability alone can result in terrible user experience and increased drop-offs.

So, we've researched, amassed, and explained a step-by-step procedure to improve your inventories' viewability and thus, increasing CPMs and user experience.

Accepted Viewability Metrics

The Media Rating Council (MRC) is a governing body which is working to secure the reliable, efficient, and valid media and user measurement systems for the Advertising industry. It has published the standard viewability metrics in percent-pixels that should be satisfied by the Ads to be deemed as viewable.

In other words, an Ad isn't counted as a valid impression, unless it satisfies the below conditions.

1. Display ads should be **at least 50% of pixels in view** for at least one second in Desktops.
2. Video ads should be **at least 50% of pixels in view** for at least two seconds in Desktops.
3. For Rising Star ads or ads larger than 242,500 pixels/970 X 250, the standard calls for **30% of pixels in view** rather than 50% for at least one second.

It is worth mentioning that viewability isn't based on engagement or effect of the ads. The goal here is provide Opportunity To See (OTS).

As a Publisher, your job is to ensure OTS is up to the mark.

Driving Viewability

According to the IAB (Interactive Advertising Bureau), viewability can be driven up in four phases.

1. Measure and Benchmark
2. Analyze
3. Plan and Execute
4. Measure and Iterate

1. Measure and BenchMark

The first and foremost step in endorsing your viewability metrics is to clearly understand the current state. Without determining where you are at the numbers, it is almost impossible to identify the immediate steps to further.

Hence, try to integrate a standard viewability measurement system in-house. If you're in a mid-market, consider partnering up with a 3rd party who can deliver the numbers for you.

If it is a 1st party/self-hosted system, make sure to assess the ad units (starting with a handful of units will be a good choice) properly and crunch the metrics as per the standard. The long-living problem in Adtech industry is evaluating metrics on one's own standard. Even today, several 3rd party vendors provide metrics based on their technology and analyze viewability of ad units using their own algorithm*.

*It doesn't mean that there will be a huge gap between the metrics of one vendor and another. But there will be enough discrepancies to cost you a few thousand dollars.

If it is a 3rd party vendor, matching your requirement with their deliverables should be your initial step. Because, showing the viewability numbers might not be enough to improve your inventory. Ensure your 3rd party vendor provide assessments on Viewability, rates, site's speed and other user experience metrics. Also, don't go with a system just for more metrics. The point is to get the essentials, not all the metrics we can.

This is your source of trust. Now you can measure and get the baseline numbers for your Ad inventories across the site. Compare the metrics with the industry standards to get an idea of where you are and how much you might need to invest (in terms of time and \$).

Once you establish a source of trust and benchmarked the metrics, move onto the next step.

2. Analyze

It's time to pick up the ad units and analyze it for the improvement. This step may require Ad Ops team effort to identify certain key factors.

- a. Create a map of ad units from the site. These units must be either included or excluded from the entire process. Constructing a map for inclusion is ideal.

- b. Track them by Ad size, Ad format, property/vertical, Geo, user consumption, etc.
- c. Get your Ad Ops team to fine-tune the list based on how viewable impressions are optimized across the industry.
- d. Collect benchmarked 3rd party/self-hosted data to compare and analyze.

3. Plan and Execute

As you have the required data and industry expectations on your hands, the focus should be on prioritizing the list.

For instance, not all units are treated equal in the ecosystem. And, it's for a good reason. You should order the list based on priority (Consider fill rates, user consumptions and other you've measured in the previous step).

This helps you to concentrate on most important units. Plan on how to improve their viewability. From site redesign to Adtech strategy, each has its part in bettering your inventories' viewability.

We'll discuss each of them a bit later (refer below).

4. Measure and Iterate

“Change is the only constant in Adtech Industry”

Reaching the desired metric will take its time and effort. But it doesn't end there. You should constantly measure and iterate the process. For a first few iterations, the data you've benchmarked in the first step will be enough.

As you exceed the benchmarked metrics, there will be a need to lift the numbers. Why?

Our industry evolves every now and then with a new set of rules and regulations. In fact, the MRC has already issued a call for research on 100% Viewability standard. It's always better to keep improving than waiting for someone to push you up.

The Keys

This section deals with the actions you should take on phase 3 - Plan and Execute. Although, there are many strategies exist to improve your viewability, we're going to focus just four.

These four are identified to be the top Viewability drivers for any website.

I. Engaging Content

It's no-brainer. If you have an engaging piece of article/landing page, reader would like to stay on the page. It means he/she won't jump back to SERP or close the tab altogether.

Longer the user stays, higher the chances of your Ad getting viewed. For most of us, placing an Ad at the right spot is still a headache. The Good ol' tradition of placing an ad above the fold won't work anymore.

And, we're seeing a lot of publishers like The New York Times, The Guardian, experimenting with user experience. As per source, they're planning to provide customized experience and interactive content to the readers based on timings (day or night).

With the myriads of technologies available, you can choose to deliver the best user experience for your readers with engaging and interactive content pieces. Next time, before publishing a blog post/landing page, ensure your content answers the following.

Is it relevant?

Is it answering your readers' queries?

Is it enough to keep them engage?

Is there a story ingrained into the context?

Is it visually appealing?

II. Site Redesign

Next thing you want to do is re-design. Let's call you design and UI/UX Engineers for a revamp.

Remember, the name itself tells the theme exactly - Re-design. It means designing again if there is a need. So, don't limit yourself to basics such as color change, overall layout changes, and others.

Instead, conduct an in-depth analysis of ad data you've collected in measuring phase. Identify how ad units are performing across the site. Now, you'll be able to compare the ad units which have high viewability (above-accepted minimum) and others which have low viewability.

This, in turn, points you to certain suggestions/actions. Partner with UX design teams on experimentation. Experimentation results would inform empirical proofs for recommendations to Design and Publisher teams.

A few examples of re-designing includes,

Making Ad unit A as adhesive on news section, as it has lower engagement rates. In lower engagement pages, users jump back to another page pretty quick. So, there will be no OTS in most cases.

Refreshing Ad unit B on technology section while in-view, as the section possess lower bounce rate and higher engagement.

Ultimately, it is up to your site's metrics and engagement rates. Join the UX and analytics teams together with Ad Ops team. Ask them to contribute and look at your inventory go!

III. Ad Latency Improvements

Ad latency is one of the well-known yet misunderstood industry issues. The ad gets called as soon as the user opens a webpage. Thus, page latency directly influences the viewability of Ad units. Improper or non-rendering of ads have been identified as the common issue caused by page latency.

Gather additional latency metrics for those sites/ad units identified in the benchmark section above, specifically including ad rendering time, site-served and 3rd party serving vendor, browser, creative type (Flash/HTML5), secure/nonsecure, etc. Since 3rd party served creatives generally tend to have higher latency, establish a vendor-specific latency plan, prioritized by revenue impact.

Then, it's optimizing. Start with the top priority (ad unit) and try to analyze and optimize the high ROI driving factors.

For instance, if optimizing creative type will reduce page load time by 50 percent, then it should be your initial move.

In addition, instituting asynchronous ad calls, avoiding passbacks, and other such tactics could lead to the reduction in ad rendering time.

IV. Ad Tech Strategies

The changes made in the above sections (Such as Site redesign, Page latency) can educate on ad tech strategies and policy changes. For instance, a 3rd party vendors creative takes too much time to load which results in increased page latency.

Ad Ops team can look at the unit and try to make it more effective by optimizing it in other aspects (making it site-serving, setting a universal timeout, etc).

Here's the list of tips your Adops, creative, and in-house media teams can perform to improve viewability.

1. Only serve below-the-fold ads when they become viewable. Share this signal with your partners in the bid request (as an ATF unit).
2. Cut down weights of creatives on high latency pages. Talk to your creative team or sales team to replace the 3rd party server with a better option. Else, charge more.

3. Set creative size limits on RTB calls.
4. Adjust ad-refresh configuration based on the viewability metrics. Frequent refreshes may badly affect user experience.
4. If you're using 3rd parties for viewability measurement, re-check and compare with another party (in a standard interval - 30 days/60 days/90 days) to ensure accuracy.
5. Keep up with the MRC regulations and data handling updates as it may affect the way we work on the servers.
6. Before accepting any 3rd party ad servers, do a test run. Make sure the server can deliver the right ad without any latency and passback errors.
7. Move the coins based on viewability. A study from IAB shows that viewability optimized inventories perform well in the auctions and earn higher CPMs.
8. Industry tech trends, such as Chrome 45 "Power Save," HTML5 versus Flash, secure creative, ad blocking, etc. impact advertiser performance. Keeping yourself up-to-date is essential to know what works and what doesn't.

Summary

This primer was created with the publishers' needs front and center. In order to improve viewability, all the key factors must be addressed: Engaging content, site design, latency, and Ad Tech/Ops strategy & policies.

As IAB says, When publishers create the necessary changes, the marketplace does respond and the rewards do follow. Optimizing inventories for viewability has gone from an option to necessary condition in a matter of few years.

Imagine, advertisers demanding viewable inventories to bid and Exchanges verifying your viewability to get you into their auction. The situation won't settle down and Adtech industry would focus on increasing the viewability metric.

Group M and other groups have started working towards 100% viewable ads. It's time for you to make your inventory viewable!

Bonus Tip

Do you know the best viewability driving display Ad sizes?

First, why you need to know it. It's because they sell more. Advertisers would like to bid on these ad slots more than others. So, you can grab a good CPM by embedding these slots into your site in the right manner.

According to Moat, an analytics and measurement provider, In-view rates are highest for 970x250 desktop display ads, 320x50 mobile display ads.

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Automatad Inc.

Automatad Inc is a publisher-focused company, which offers programmatic monetization suite for publishers of all sizes. It has partnered with 100+ publishers around the globe and considered as the leader of the Indian Market.

For discussing more about viewability of your inventory and how you can drive 2x more revenue, contact our marketing head - marketing@automatad.com

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