

# THE ADOPTION OF VIEWABLE IMPRESSIONS – STATUS

**George Ivie, Media Rating Council**

---

## Executive Summary

Efforts have been underway in the United States to understand, validate and adopt viewable impressions for digital display and video advertisements since early 2009. The Media Rating Council has been involved in this process from that early point through today, when there is a concerted effort by several Industry organizations to move from served impression counting to viewable impression counting as widely available measure in the U.S.

This paper summarizes the case for viewable impression counting and how this metric differs from the prior served impression standard. Additionally we summarize work that has been done to evaluate these new metrics and the current status of Industry standard setting efforts as well as the overall Industry momentum. We include the specifics of advisory releases that have been issued by the Media Rating Council describing this information to the marketplace, which will serve to ensure readers have an understanding of the actual guidance that has been released on the subject of viewable impressions.

Much of the work related to viewable impressions for the last three years was lead by an Industry group called 3MS (Making Measurement Make Sense); the group includes a large number of industry practitioners (200+ experts) and involvement, funding and sponsorship from the Association of National Advertisers, the 4As and the Interactive Advertising Bureau. This group issued a statement of general principles of which the move to viewable impressions was the first identified principle. The 3MS group is working jointly with MRC, given all parties were aligned on the importance of viewable impression measurement and several other of the 3MS general principles, to move these areas forward.

## Background of the Media Rating Council (MRC)

The MRC is a non-profit Industry association established in 1963 composed of leading media companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and trade associations, whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. To accomplish this goal the MRC sets measurement standards and conducts audits of organizations that measure media (an MRC “accreditation” process).

Measurement services desiring MRC accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC *Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research* and other standards written by MRC; and submit to MRC-designed audits to validate and illuminate their procedures. The audit process is a key driver of quality and full disclosure by measurement services. The MRC audit and accreditation process is voluntary, essentially a form of Industry self-regulation. Currently approximately 85 research products are audited each year by the MRC. Additionally, the MRC conducts audits and advises local media committees from time-to-time in more than 12 countries outside the U.S.

In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the U.S. marketplace.

As noted above, the MRC is one of the few organizations that issues measurement standards in the U.S., and we actively work with other associations across many media genres to set detailed measurement guidelines which provide direct operational guidance on measurement best practices and minimum standards of quality to practitioners. For example, in the U.S. we have worked with the IAB as a sponsoring association (and sometimes the Mobile Marketing Association) to issue measurement guidelines in the following areas of digital advertising:

- Served Ad Impressions (with IAB)
- Rich Media (with IAB)
- Rich Internet Application (with IAB)
- Digital Video Served Impressions (with IAB)
- Clicks (with IAB)
- Audience Reach (with IAB)
- In-Game Ad Impressions (with IAB)
- Mobile Browser based Ad Impressions (with IAB and MMA)
- In-Application Ad Impressions (with IAB and MMA)

The above completed measurement guidelines can be found on the web site of the sponsoring association(s). These guidelines setting efforts are the product of more than 10 years of joint collaboration between MRC, IAB and more recently adding MMA in the mobile areas.

The MRC has several standards/guidelines projects currently in process. The following describes the primary efforts:

1. IAB Guidelines Modernization: MRC has been working with a new committee of the IAB that we suggested, called the EITF – the Emerging Innovations Task Force – to modernize the set of IAB guidelines that have been promulgated over the last 10 years (see list of completed digital guidelines above). This is a permanent committee of IAB that will assist MRC in vetting standards setting issues.

Some of the projects being handled by this group with the MRC include:

- Viewable Display and Video Advertising Guidelines – the viewable impression conversion
  - Creating a “Client-Side” Requirement for the Mobile Web Guidelines (completed, issued during 2012)
  - Stronger “Unique” Disclosure Requirements (completed, issued during 2013)
  - Modernization and Strengthening Filtration Techniques for Non-Human Traffic
  - Geo-Targeting Assessment Parameters
  - Stronger Auto-Refresh and Pre-Fetch Requirements
  - Recognizing User Interactions and engagement metrics
2. Digital GRPs and Cross-Media GRPs: We have put initial thoughts together on guidelines for Digital and Cross-Media GRP guidelines – representing a rough outline of concepts involved. We have initially exposed this to the IAB EITF, however, this will likely involve a much larger group of participants from all types of media. We anticipate growing the participant group and devoting substantial effort to this initiative in the first half of 2013.
  3. Social Media Measurement: The MRC has initiated a project with the IAB and the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) to write social media measurement guidelines. This project involves consumer listening and consumer experience management applications – involving scraping social media content and assessing that content for sentiment, brand mentions, etc.

Future Work (generally not initiated yet):

Additionally, the MRC Standards Governance Committee voted to establish priorities for moving forward with other standards setting initiatives. The results of that vote were as follows:

High Priority

- Return Path Data Audience Estimates (a prior guideline was completed on RPD data accumulation processes and controls)
- Sample Quality/Hybridization

Medium

- Ad Effectiveness
- Audio Streaming
- Digital Place-Based Measurement
- Media Mix Modeling Fairness

Lower

- Mobile Messaging

## **MRC Involvement with 3MS**

During 2012 the MRC interacted extensively with members of the 3MS project, having over 50 meetings with Bain & Co. (the consulting organization engaged by 3MS to facilitate the overall project) and several meetings with 3MS industry representatives. MRC was instrumental in some of the conclusions reached by 3MS, since MRC assisted in acclimating the project team to measurement specifics. Eventually, when Bain’s engagement ended, the 3MS leadership team concluded that MRC was well positioned to advance certain of the 3MS priorities and asked the staff and MRC Board to assume a leadership role on these (many were already aligned with MRC priorities – such as Viewable Impressions, Digital and Cross-Media GRPs and cleaning up ad effectiveness research).

Our involvement with the main supporting associations in 3MS – the ANA, 4As and the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) – continues to be extensive, and this is generally focused on bringing digital measurement into line with other media types for comparability purposes (for example, viewable impressions, GRP measurement). We believe the strengthening of our relationships with these associations has been very positive for MRC and will also help lead to broad benefits for measurement across the industry in the future.

However, it is critical that the reader understand that MRC is an independent entity, separate from 3MS. This is primarily because of our auditing and accreditation function that mandates MRC to maintain real and perceived independence from any one constituency or association.

## Industry Pilot Testing and Advisory Documents

In order to effectively set guidelines for measuring viewable impressions and to ensure the Industry had a complete understanding of issues associated with viewable measurement, a large-scale industry pilot test was conducted in late 2012. This involved processing transactions including viewable measurements in production environments across production advertising campaigns volunteered for assessment by industry practitioners.

The results of this pilot test lead to the issuance of industry advisories by the Media Rating Council. The actual advisories are included in this paper as follows to ensure complete communication about the status of viewable impression measurement. The first advisory was issued in November 2012 and an updated advisory was issued in June 2013.

These advisories expressed serious concern about the measurement of viewable impressions and the state of measurement technology at the time – which led to large numbers of un-measurable transactions in campaigns (essentially situations where the viewable state could not be determined). Specific circumstances are described in the advisories in detail – in summary, causes included (1) inability to see into cross-domain iFrames and (2) served impression guidelines allowing counting of ads in certain circumstances prior to render which would not be measurable by viewable determination functions. There are other cases generally representing correctable trafficking issues that are not highlighted herein.

### MRC Advisory – November 2012

(See Appendix A)

### MRC Advisory Update – June 2013

(See Appendix B)

## Viewable Impression Guideline Status

The MRC and the IAB EITF has been undertaking efforts to complete an industry guideline for viewable impression measurement, including both display advertising and video advertising. This process has been difficult and time consuming. Overall we have reached general consensus on the measurement standard surrounding digital display advertisements (including special cases – such as very large format ads), however the language for video advertising is still in process. Substantial debate continues around the duration of a viewable video ad impression.

The MRC's goal is to remove its viewable impression advisory from marketplace consideration by the end of calendar year 2013. We are committed to an orderly transition based on appropriate measurement effectiveness, fairness and full disclosure. Accordingly we are working on a number of open tasks that need to be completed before our advisory can be removed. A summary of the most important tasks is as follows:

- Completion of the Viewable Impression Guideline for both Display and Video Advertisements
- Complete a vendor reconciliation process designed to investigate and promote closure of methodological gaps that cause measurement differences between vendors
  - Provide guidance to practitioners on how discrepancies are minimized

Each task above will be discussed in further detail in this paper.

Appendix C presents information on remaining viewable impression guideline tasks in a timeline graphic, which was recently shared with the U.S. industry by MRC.

### Completion of the Viewable Impression Guideline

At the present time, the working draft of the viewable impression guideline contains the following guidance:

Specific to the measurement of Browser Based Display Advertisements:

- At least 50% of the pixels of the ad have to appear on the viewable space of the browser for at least one continuous second to be considered a viewable impression.
  - Basis: 50% established by examining billions of display ads and flow of viewable and non-viewable states
  - Basis: One second was based on research into underlying cognition of physical (display) advertisements which generally show it takes sub-second to one second of continuous time to recognize an advertising message
    - The pilot testing provided no information to refute this time requirement

Specific to the measurement of Browser Based Video Advertisements:

- A Video Ad that meets the Viewable Impression requirements for Display Ads (i.e., 50% of pixels in view for one continuous second) is considered a “Discernible Video Ad”
- The draft definition of a “Viewable Video Ad” requires that 5 seconds of the ad is played, meeting the 50% pixel requirement. Additionally,
  - The 5 second need not be continuous, nor the 1<sup>st</sup> 5 seconds of the video advertisement
  - Strong user interaction with the advertisement can result in the ad being counted as viewable, even if it does not meet the time/pixel requirements
    - These counts should be segregated in reporting
  - If the pixel threshold is applied to the player rather than the ad within the player, this must be disclosed
  - Consideration of presence of audio is encouraged, but not required because of current technical limitations surrounding the industry’s ability to accurately/completely determine the presence of audio.

Further study and data collection is in process regarding viewable browser-based video advertisements; this data is being analyzed by MRC in an effort to form a basis for establishing a duration requirement for video viewable advertising decisions. In the meantime, the debate surrounding the duration of a viewable video advertisement continues (the 5 second requirement proposed above) with many in the industry on the sell-side expressing concern. Many buy side practitioners are just as concerned about what they view as a short 5-second requirement for a viewable video, which they believe does not reflect the opportunity to see a “brand” in a video environment.

[Note: The guideline being prepared is for browser based video advertising, it does not cover video consumed in applications, television or over-the-top TV like devices. Those have been handled or are planned in other guideline setting efforts.]

Here are some complexities observed in browser-based video ad-campaign data processed so far:

- Un-measurable Cases: The vast majority (exceeding 80%) were observed in 300X250 ad sizes (likely in banner) within cross-domain iFrames
  - MRC is proposing these Ads should be segregated from other viewable video reported
  - These iFrame videos would benefit from Safe-Frame and possibly differentiated (display-based) measurement criteria
- Inactive windows: A high proportion of measurable cases (>50%) were in inactive windows
  - In many cases when a user makes a video “full screen” this reports as being in an inactive window. Processes need to be set up to filter full screen cases from other out-of-focus situations; greatest impact to third parties, not sites with player access.
- Fall-offs observed on average:
  - Difference between consecutive 1 second viewable and 3 seconds viewable was -12.1%
  - Difference between consecutive 1 second and 5 seconds was -18.8%
  - Difference between consecutive 5 seconds and any 5 seconds was 8.5%

[Note: Much of this data was supplied by the Open Video Standard Coalition, a group that is collaborating with MRC and IAB in supplying data and assisting in vetting the viewable video guideline. We thank them for their cooperation and assistance.]

*Further work is necessary to isolate-out creative impact by site and serving type (in test and control) to make a definitive determination of what duration is necessary for a viewable video advertising impression.*

#### Completion of a Vendor Reconciliation Process

The MRC will be working with measurement vendors (for viewable impression measurement), media organizations, agencies and advertisers to complete a vendor reconciliation process whereby we will oversee processing of digital advertising campaigns tagged across multiple vendors to determine the size, source/cause and solutions for observed measurement differences between vendors. This project will be executed during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of calendar year 2013. The reconciliation work is very similar to a project conducted several years ago to reconcile and determine causes for discrepancies for served impression counting – such a project for viewable impressions has been in our plans all along.

The project will likely involve two stages of testing: (1) lab-based controlled testing using automated serving tools, and (2) production campaign measurement and evaluation. We will be seeking to address causes for viewable impression count differences between vendors, however the reader should be cautioned that this will not mean that all vendors will produce the exact same counts. Vendors have different approaches and different levels of innovation – the goal will be to have a greater understanding of the causes of vendor differences and close gaps where we can.

#### **Concluding Comments**

The work to move-forward a viewable impression guideline continues in the U.S. Clearly there are many tasks yet to perform and substantial debate ahead before a shift in measurement metrics can be accomplished on a market-wide basis, particularly for video advertising. The shift to viewable impressions is important and practitioners, especially advertisers, are aligned with moving this process forward.

The MRC is working with many in the industry to follow a reasonable path toward adoption, which we have set a timing goal for as the end of calendar year 2013. Since much work remains, this is clearly a “goal.”

We continue to seek input, credible sources of data for consideration and industry cooperation in the guideline setting process and we welcome input.

Appendix A – Viewable Impression Advisory (Issued by MRC, November 2012)  
**[Originally on MRC Letterhead]**

### MRC INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION

Contact: George W. Ivie, CEO  
 212-972-0300  
[givie@mediaratingcouncil.org](mailto:givie@mediaratingcouncil.org)

New York, NY – November 14, 2012

### **VIEWABLE IMPRESSION ADVISORY**

The MRC is leading the cross ecosystem movement toward the transition from served to viewable ad impressions for online advertising transactions. Aligned with the Making Measurement Make Sense (3MS) initiative's recommendation, the MRC believes that online advertising impressions, particularly for brand advertising campaigns, should be viewable in order to be more comparable to other media which afford the "Opportunity to See" as the basis of currency.

Several vendors – including ad servers, verification services and third-party syndicated measurers – have developed solutions for determining whether served ads become viewable and to count ads based on viewable parameters. Based on large-scale tests of real advertiser campaigns as detailed within, while capabilities vary, the ability to consistently measure whether impressions are viewable is a challenge that must be overcome by most of the vendors before finalizing a new online advertising currency definition. The number of impressions in a campaign for which viewability cannot be determined is often significant.

The use of projections to measure viewability is not a recommended solution at the present time because the full range of causes of these viewability undetermined impressions has not been sufficiently identified. Simply put, the MRC believes that more work needs to be done to understand the methods that underlie these techniques and the impact of the viewability of undetermined impressions on the ability to project.

Cross domain iFrames are a significant issue and we support the IAB's SafeFrame initiative and any others designed to address this issue that may prove to be viable. The SafeFrame initiative will create a communication protocol that will permit determining the viewability of ads that appear in cross domain iFrames. A solution to the iFrame problem must be an industry priority. While cross domain iFrames are the primary reason viewability cannot always be measured, there are other reasons that need to be addressed as fully as possible. Two possible causes that may be contributing are varying capabilities across the viewable vendors and some instances of viewable decision tags simply not "firing."

***Overall, there is a critical need to develop intelligence around unmeasured and non-viewable cases.***

MRC recommends that the entire ecosystem continue to test and refine the definitions, thresholds and implementation steps required to transition to a viewable impressions currency for internet media transactions.

#### Consideration of Current 3MS Proposed Thresholds for Viewability

Pilot results indicate that the current proposed 50% of pixels in view for one second is a reasonable threshold for *most* display ads. However, further analyses must be undertaken. It is highly likely that certain ad types, notably larger ads like the IAB Rising Stars, will require special considerations, and the MRC is actively pursuing solutions including proposing viewability criteria for these ads.

Under the reasonable assumption that strong user interaction with ads (for example, clicking on them) indicates viewability, MRC is considering ways to develop and codify language around the interactions and the viewability thresholds.

Video ads, hypothesized to be largely viewable, require separate consideration for appropriate viewability thresholds, particularly around both sight and sound.

### **INDUSTRY ACTION ITEMS**

***MRC believes it is premature to transact on viewability in advance of a fuller understanding of the points detailed in the following paragraphs.***

MRC strongly advocates that the buying and selling communities educate their members on the basic findings from the large-scale pilot test:

- There is significant variability in vendor capabilities to measure viewability – we encourage buyers and sellers to seek validated viewability solutions (i.e., solutions that have been audited and accredited/certified against applicable industry standards by an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party) and ensure they clearly describe what can and cannot be measured.

- Cross domain iFrames pose a large obstacle to measuring viewability. While partial solutions exist and others are under development, no vendor known to MRC today can determine viewability in all cross domain iFrame situations.
- Other causes that result in an inability to measure viewability must be understood by MRC and the Industry in order to finalize measurement and transactional requirements.
- Of paramount importance to changing the currency is achieving consistently higher levels of measurability.

Currencies and standards can change for the better when the planned analyses and solutions are in place. The point of currencies and standards is to improve the supply chain. Moving to a new, as yet not fully measurable currency on a wholesale basis at this juncture could do more harm than good.

MRC has put forth a timeline that calls for additional learnings and analyses to be generated through Q1 2013. Testing of the SafeFrame solution for cross domain iFrames is also scheduled to happen during this time and, last but not least, a new guideline for viewability will be in market for public comment in Q1 2013. Following the viewability guideline public comment period, MRC believes it would be wise to conduct a full in-market parallel data test to ensure that all parties have an opportunity to evaluate the old and new datasets prior to adopting viewable impression currency for transactions. MRC also suggests that the Terms and Conditions used for online campaigns be adjusted to account for the introduction of viewable impressions as a currency metric.

The following pages describe the viewable impressions pilot testing in greater detail. We encourage you to read.

#### *VIEWABLE IMPRESSION AGENCY PILOT TESTING SUMMARY*

##### BACKGROUND

In spring 2012, MRC, with the support of the entire ecosystem as represented by the member companies of the ANA, 4A's, and IAB, and the Board of Directors of the MRC, took on the leadership of efforts to transition digital display advertising to a viewable impression transactional currency. The proposed criteria or standard for viewability, recommended by the industry leaders who participated in Making Measurement Make Sense (3MS), is at least 50% of pixels in view for a minimum of one second.

The 3MS initiative envisions viewable impressions as the foundational element in the development of transparent and consistent metrics for display advertising. The intention of the 3MS initiative is to define metrics that work for brand advertisers and permit facile cross platform media planning, buying and evaluation. In addition, the 3MS leadership supports the expansion of the MRC into the foremost standards development institution for all media.

##### TESTING VIEWABILITY WITH REAL ADVERTISER FLIGHTS

MRC oversaw pilot tests of viewable impressions using real advertiser campaigns in live production environments that ran during May and June 2012. In total, twenty-two campaigns representing more than three billion served impressions<sup>1</sup> were examined. Seventeen advertisers and twelve agencies were involved. The ad campaigns ran in a variety of environments and deployed inventory purchased both directly from publishers as well as from network sales channels. The only requirement that was imposed across all the campaigns, regardless of agency, advertiser brand or target audience, was that the agency ad servers used to serve the pilot campaigns be MRC accredited.

In addition, five viewability measurement vendors participated in the pilot tests. Each vendor was required to demonstrate in advance of its participation in the pilot its ability to measure or not measure viewability under seventeen different scenarios as defined by the MRC.

##### PURPOSE OF VIEWABILITY PILOTS

The pilot test of actual, live brand campaigns using agency ad servers had three primary objectives:

- Estimate the impact of imposing a viewable criterion on impression counting for display ads;
- Provide a basis for evaluating the efficacy of the proposed minimum of 50% pixels in view for a minimum of one second and determine if the proposed thresholds should be adjusted in a final viewable impression standard;
- Discover any other relevant issues that might be important in developing an industry standard for the viewable impression.

##### PILOT RESULTS

Key findings that have broad implications for the recommended industry action items in this document include:

- Viewable rates for the live campaigns in the test showed tremendous variability, ranging from a high of 78.6% to a low of 7.8%. **Viewable rates are calculated off of a base of impressions that could be measured for viewability.**
- The ability to measure whether impressions are viewable or not is still extremely variable. The test campaigns showed a range of 0% to 77% of **served impressions that were measured for viewability.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Served impressions are the current industry standard, used for the selling and buying of digital display.

- Cross domain iFrames present a challenge to measuring viewability because they can obscure the capacity to determine whether or not an ad impression is viewable. Cross domain iFrames have an important function in protecting content and protecting undisclosed data collection from occurring on a publisher's site.
- Cross domain iFrames were the reason behind 3/4 of the unmeasured impressions in network placements in the pilot, and more than 1/3 of the unmeasured impressions in publisher placements.
- Overall measured impression rates across all pilot campaigns were 27% for publisher placements, and 19% across ad network placements.
- Viewable rates varied by ad sizes within placement types (network/publisher). Rates ranged from 12.6% to 63.7% for the most popular ad sizes deployed by the advertisers in the pilot test. Most popular was determined by the number of impressions served.
- Viewable rates observed in the pilot testing for the largest and smallest advertising units, as well as certain rich media executions, showed that the MRC needs to consider appending additional viewable parameters or otherwise altering parameters in certain special advertising circumstances. This is being studied and will be proposed to the Industry in the written viewable impression guideline.

We welcome questions.

#### About MRC

The Media Rating Council is a non-profit industry association established in 1964 comprised of leading television, radio, print and internet companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and trade associations, whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. Measurement services desiring MRC accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC *Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research* as well as other applicable industry measurement guidelines; and submit to MRC-designed audits to authenticate and illuminate their procedures. In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the marketplace. Currently approximately 80 research products are audited by the MRC. Additional information about MRC can be found at [www.mediaratingcouncil.org](http://www.mediaratingcouncil.org).

###

Appendix B – Viewable Impression Advisory Update (Issued by MRC June 2013)  
**[Originally on MRC letterhead]**

**MRC INDUSTRY COMMUNICATION**

Contact: George W. Ivie, CEO  
 212-972-0300  
[givie@mediaratingcouncil.org](mailto:givie@mediaratingcouncil.org)

New York, NY – June 12, 2013

**UPDATE TO NOVEMBER 2012 VIEWABLE IMPRESSION ADVISORY**

As part of its work to advance the viewable impression as a digital advertising currency metric, MRC has been engaged in pilot testing and standards development work for more than a year. Information gained from these activities led us to issue an Industry Communication titled “Viewable Impression Advisory” last November to provide the industry with a status report on the state of viewable impression measurement, and to call out the key obstacles that MRC believed stood in the way of moving to viewable impressions as a currency metric on a widespread basis.

This communication provides an update on the status of these matters, and on the estimated timeline for when MRC believes they will no longer be gating issues standing in the way of the marketplace transacting on viewability on a widespread basis. In summary:

- MRC believes it is still premature at this time to transact on viewability, although much progress has been made on the issues that led us to issue our original Advisory in November 2012.
- An increasing number of viewability vendors have been accredited by MRC, and still more are in process, which is serving to validate their processes and improve disclosure of their varying capabilities.
- Cross domain iFrames continue to present varying degrees of challenge for most viewability measurers. IAB’s SafeFrame specification, which was released in March 2013, is expected to help significantly in this regard.
- More is known today about those impediments to viewability measurement apart from cross domain iFrames, and this knowledge is informing the development of viewability measurement standards.
- MRC will administer a reconciliation project later this year that will seek to account for the causes of discrepancies in viewable impression counts among accredited vendors.
- MRC expects to be in a position to lift the Viewable Impression Advisory by year end 2013.

Further details on each of the above are provided in the following sections.

**Industry Action Items: Updated**

As of today, MRC still believes it is premature to transact on viewability until the issues noted in the original Viewable Impression Advisory are more fully addressed. While much progress has been made over the last six months, as is detailed below, additional work remains.

The italicized text below is drawn from the “Industry Action Items” section of the November 2012 Viewable Impression Advisory, and is followed by the current status of each issue:

1. *There is significant variability in vendor capabilities to measure viewability – we encourage buyers and sellers to seek validated viewability solutions (i.e., solutions that have been audited and accredited/certified against applicable industry standards by an independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party) and ensure they clearly describe what can and cannot be measured.*

Variability in vendor capabilities remains, but more and more vendors are seeking (and gaining) accreditation/certification by independent 3<sup>rd</sup> parties, which is resulting in improved levels of disclosure about their relative capabilities. In the coming days, MRC will make available on its website ([www.mediaringcouncil.org](http://www.mediaringcouncil.org)) a brief summary of the viewability measurement capabilities for each vendor accredited by MRC for measurement of viewable display advertising impressions.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Cross domain iFrames pose a large obstacle to measuring viewability. While partial solutions exist and others are under development, no vendor known to MRC today can determine viewability in all cross domain iFrame situations.*

Cross domain iFrames remain an impediment to viewability measurement for many, if not most, viewability measurers. However, measurement approaches do exist that can determine the viewability of ads even in cross domain iFrame situations. In addition, in March, IAB released its SafeFrame 1.0 specification, a communication protocol that, when implemented, will facilitate viewability measurement of advertising that appears within cross domain iFrames. SafeFrame testing will be conducted over the coming months, and publishers and ad servers are considering adoption. Ultimately, the introduction and adoption of SafeFrame is expected to provide a solution to the cross domain iFrame dilemma in many situations.

---

<sup>2</sup> The following vendors/products are currently accredited by the MRC for their measurements of viewable display ad impressions: comScore vCE (Validation component), DoubleVerify, Google ActiveView, RealVu, and spider.io.

3. *Other causes that result in an inability to measure viewability must be understood by MRC and the Industry in order to finalize measurement and transactional requirements.*

Much work has been done since the original Advisory was issued to identify the causes of those situations in which viewability measurement was hindered, apart from the previously known cross domain iFrame situation. This knowledge will be reflected in the forthcoming IAB Viewable Impression Measurement Guidelines document, a draft version of which is expected to be released for public comment shortly, as well as in revisions that are planned for the existing IAB Measurement Guidelines governing the counting of served display impressions. The revisions to this latter document will be centered on tightening the current guidelines for served impression measurement, and is likely to include discouraging “count on decision”-like approaches, which are client-side counting methods acceptable under the current guidelines, but have been shown to be more likely to count served impressions for ads that never actually render on the browser.

4. *Of paramount importance to changing the currency is achieving consistently higher levels of measurability.*

As was the case last November, this remains the goal at which the above actions are directed.

#### **Next Steps:**

##### Reconciliation Project

Now that a healthy number of vendors have been accredited for their viewable impression measurements (and more are likely to achieve accreditation in the coming months), MRC intends to embark on a “reconciliation project” that will be designed to identify and isolate the reasons for discrepancies in viewable impression measurements among different vendors. MRC believes this project, similar to one conducted several years ago designed to identify the reasons for differences in served impression counts between publisher and third-party ad servers, will ultimately result in a reduction in discrepancies, and thereby reduce a potential source of friction in the marketplace and smooth the transition to a viewable impression currency. This reconciliation project, which was dependent upon having a significant number of vendors whose viewability measurement capabilities are fully known by MRC, will unfold over the second half of 2013.

##### Anticipated Timetable

To summarize the current expectations regarding the timetable for lifting MRC’s Advisory on viewable impressions:

- We expect a draft viewable impression standards document will be released for public comment within approximately the next month.
- MRC will continue to add to its learnings about non-measured served impressions, and will initiate (and complete) the reconciliation project in the second half of the year.
- MRC will work with IAB to update the existing measurement guidelines for served ad impressions, beginning in Q3 of this year.
- IAB’s SafeFrame protocol will be tested throughout the second half of the year.
- Auditing of additional viewable impression measurers will continue throughout the foreseeable future.
- Based on the above, MRC currently expects to lift its Viewable Impression Advisory by year end 2013.

Finally, as was noted in the November 2012 Advisory notice, MRC suggests that the Terms and Conditions used for online campaigns be adjusted to account for the introduction of viewable impressions as a currency.

##### About MRC

The Media Rating Council is a non-profit industry association established in 1964 comprised of leading television, radio, print and internet companies, as well as advertisers, advertising agencies and trade associations, whose goal is to ensure measurement services that are valid, reliable and effective. Measurement services desiring MRC accreditation are required to disclose to their customers all methodological aspects of their service; comply with the MRC *Minimum Standards for Media Rating Research* as well as other applicable industry measurement guidelines; and submit to MRC-designed audits to authenticate and illuminate their procedures. In addition, the MRC membership actively pursues research issues they consider priorities in an effort to improve the quality of research in the marketplace. Currently approximately 85 research products are audited by the MRC. Additional information about MRC can be found at [www.mediaratingcouncil.org](http://www.mediaratingcouncil.org).

###

Appendix C – Viewable Impression Timeline

## Digital Initiatives – Define Viewable Impressions

