MRC Interim Guidance on In-Game Measurement
Issued September 9, 2021

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and the Media Rating Council (MRC) released the final version of the *In-Game Advertising Measurement Guidelines* in September 2009 (*In-Game Guidelines*), developed by the IAB In-Game Ad Measurement Working Group with guidance from the IAB Games Committee. Originally, these Guidelines were intended to cover dynamic, in-game advertisements that appear in Personal Computers (PC) or Console-based games, and were not intended to cover: Around-Game Advertisements; Static In-Game or Sponsorship Ads; 3D Ads; Event-based Ads; or Ads that appear in games in a mobile environment.

Since 2009, IAB and MRC have produced several Guidelines and Standards related to various aspects of digital measurement, some of which provide guidance in areas that overlap or supersede guidance contained within the *In-Game Advertising Measurement Guidelines*. As we understand that the overall digital as well as In-Game industry has changed dramatically since 2009, and continues to evolve rapidly, this memo is intended to provide updated guidance in the areas where MRC believes the original *In-Game Guidelines* have been superseded by more recent guidance (those details are further discussed below) or where the previous Guidelines may continue to be applicable. The goal of this is to provide a framework for MRC accreditation auditing of in-game measurement under currently published Guidance.

Furthermore, we also plan to coordinate with IAB Tech Lab in order to initiate a larger effort to convene a working group with the objective of re-visiting and discussing all areas of the existing *In-Game Guidelines*, and produce a comprehensive updated version of this document that will reflect the current environment. Such updates will consider specific requirements such as viewability for the In-Game environment. This effort will be coordinated through the Modernizing Measurement Task Force or MMTF, a group made up of IAB members, other industry participants and the MRC, that previously worked to update the IAB/MRC Digital Impression, Mobile Web, Mobile In-app and Video Guidelines. Further details of this effort are forthcoming.

Detailed Interim Guidance

MRC believes the following interim guidance represents an appropriate approach to in-game measurement and reporting currently, and for an additional interim period, until the necessary study, testing, and industry discussions occur to properly update and modernize the existing *In-Game Guidelines*, which will allow MRC to promulgate more permanent guidance on these matters. The following section quotes are excerpts from the IAB/MRC *In-Game Guidelines* (referenced by page number), followed by MRC updated guidance to be applied as part of accreditation audits or details of planned future updates to existing *In-Game Guidelines* for each specific area.

1. General: Scope of Guidelines

    a. Pg. 4 – *These guidelines are intended to cover dynamic, in-game advertisements that appear in PC or Console-based games.*

        These guidelines are not intended at this time to cover the following: Around-Game Advertisements; Static In-Game or Sponsorship Ads; 3D Ads; Event-based Ads; or Ads that appear in games in a mobile environment. These guidelines also do not consider the impact of those Users who may opt out of receiving advertisements during game play; this circumstance may be considered at a future time pending study of the potential impact of such non-participation upon reported measurements. For purposes of this guideline and until further guidance is developed, Users who opt out of receiving advertisements should not contribute to valid ad impressions.

        This document is principally applicable to those organizations involved in the PC and Console game industries, and is intended as a guide to accepted practices, as developed by the IAB and MRC. In addition, In-Game Advertising planners and buyers can use this document to assist in determining the quality of measurements.

        Update: As noted above, the *In-Game Guidelines* were limited in scope, based on the current environment at the time. However, we believe that in the intervening time the in-game environment has changed, requiring an expansion of the scope of these updated Guidelines to other platforms such as Mobile Web and Mobile In-App as well as other gaming environments. Various IAB/MRC Guidelines have been issued specific to Display and Video Impression measurement in Mobile Web and Mobile In-App environments, and we believe that some aspects of this existing guidance is applicable to in-game. As mentioned above, MRC plans to coordinate with IAB Tech Lab to reconvene the MMTF to update and modernize the existing *In-Game Guidelines*, and through these efforts we plan to expand and re-define the scope of them and also to potentially include consideration of Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), Lens placements and 3D Ads.

2. Impression measurement

    a. Pg. 6 – *3.1 Ad Impressions – A measurement of an advertising exposure occurrence, contained within real-time or stored and transmitted client-side game-play activity records, sourced from a properly installed and functioning game application, or measurement application within or external to a game application, being played by a Client-User …*

        This guideline requires measurement to be based on client-side in-game activity, sourced from game Session information records containing advertising exposure occurrences and not solely ascribed activity, solely inferred information records or server-side transactions. Similar to requirements summarized in other measurement

guidelines promulgated by the IAB, server-side transactions of in-game activity do not provide sufficient evidence that the Client-User was actually exposed to the advertising message.

Update: The above guidance has been superseded by the impression definitions in updated IAB/MRC Measurement Guidelines when measuring traditional Display and Video ad units, as applicable for each creative type and platform. These include: the *Desktop Display Impression Measurement Guidelines*; the *Digital Video Impression Measurement Guidelines*; the *Mobile Web Advertising Measurement Guidelines*; and, the *Mobile Application (In-App) Advertising Measurement Guidelines*.

Impression measurement related to these creative types in-game within the above environments should follow this guidance, should be based on client-initiated signals, and should follow begin-to-render (inclusive of play for video) requirements as discussed within these guidelines. Further, the MRC believes the begin-to-render impression definition is suitable for measuring impressions in PC and console-based gaming environments.

3. Viewability measurement

   b. Pg. 7 - *In cases where the game is browser based, valid ad impressions can only be counted (and ad exposure units, the building blocks of valid ad impressions when a cumulative counting approach is used, can only occur) during times when game play is in focus on the Client-User's browser. The on-top or dominant tab within a tabbed browser or windowed environment qualifies as "in focus" for measurement purposes.*

   c. Pg. 8 – *The threshold for a valid Ad Impression is a cumulative exposure to an ad of ten (10) seconds. An In-Game Measurement Organization may accumulate ad exposures of shorter time lengths to achieve this Ad Impression threshold. In all instances, the ad exposures that can contribute to this cumulative Ad Impression threshold must be a continuous exposure of one-half (0.5) seconds or more. The specific counting methods used for such cumulative approaches should be fully disclosed.*

   d. Pg. 9 – *3.1.2.1 Minimum Ad Size – The ad must be a minimum of 1.5% of screen coverage.*

   e. Pg. 10 – *3.1.2.2. Lighting – Only ads that are visible within the virtual game environment with sufficient lighting during darkness should be counted.*

   f. Pg. 10 – 3.1.2.3 *Maximum Ad Angle Relative to Game Screen – The angle of the ad must be no greater than 55 degrees relative to the game screen.*

   g. Pg. 10 – *3.1.2.4 Occlusion Determination – Occlusion represents an instance where the In-Game ad unit is blocked from view either totally or partially during game play, and therefore the User's ability to cognitively recognize the message is diminished.*

In-Game Measurement Organizations are encouraged to specifically identify and segregate occluded ad impressions for reporting purposes. Use or non-use of Occlusion rules, and specific rules where used, should be disclosed.

Update: The *IAB/MRC In-Game Guidelines* were written before the concept of opportunity to see or viewability was established, and commingle concepts that go beyond delivered or rendered impressions. While guidance related to ad size, screen angle and lighting is important for in-game measurement, MRC considers the above criteria to be related to viewability measurement or opportunity to see, as opposed to impression measurement. MRC has authored the *Viewable Ad Impression Measurement Guidelines* and the *Mobile Viewable Ad Impression Measurement Guidelines*, which supersede the above guidance for measurement of Viewable Impressions, but believes this guidance cannot be applied to in-game measurement at this time without further study and discussion to account for the unique aspects discussed above. Future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* will include further discussions regarding viewability measurement in the in-game environment and as such, further guidance in this area is expected.

At the present time, the MRC does not believe adequate guidance for in-game viewability measurement yet exists and we do not believe existing standards would be sufficiently rigorous nor include the necessary parameters to determine the Viewability of in-game ads. We therefore strongly discourage the use of existing Viewability requirements as applicable for In-Game environments. Should a measurement vendor choose to disregard this MRC recommendation and report Viewability metrics before the development of in-game specific viewability requirements by MRC, strong empirical support for the thresholds used for Viewability should be maintained and these should consider inclusion of the parameters mentioned above (i.e., focus, angle, lighting, opacity and ad size).

In the interim, in-game Impressions should be measured distinct of viewability considerations and, as stated above, Impression measurement should follow guidance released by IAB/MRC, as discussed in item 2.a. At this time, the MRC will not accredit Viewability metrics in the in-game environment.

4. Invalid Traffic (IVT) Detection

   a. Pg. 10 – *3.1.2.5 Non-Human Activity – Valid ad impressions shall not be counted if the In-Game measurement organization has indication that the associated game-play activity is robotic or non-human.*

      Depending upon the game environment, the in-game measurement organization may be required to perform active filtration for non-human activity from robots or spiders. For closed game environments such filtration is generally not applicable.

    b. Pg. 10 – *3.1.2.6 Internal Traffic – Ad impressions arising from activity of employees of the in-game measurement organization should be removed from reported counts.*

        Update: MRC has authored the *Invalid Traffic Detection and Filtration Standards Addendum*, and this supersedes any guidance related to IVT within the *In-Game Guidelines* and should be applied to the measurement of ad impressions regardless of environment. It's important to note that future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* may include additional considerations related to IVT specific to the in-game environment. However, for closed game environments such filtration is generally not applicable.

5. Audience Measurement

    a. *Pg. 12 – 3.1.7 User Attribution – In certain circumstances, an in-game measurement organization may have the ability to attribute game-play Sessions or activity to a specific User (or a Unique User over a reporting period). If User attribution is employed and disclosed as part of the monetization of an ad-campaign, the methodology for determining the User (or Unique User) should be specified and fully disclosed.*

    Counts arising from User attribution methods based on User input (such as registration or in-Session polling) should be specified and disclosed separately from User attribution methods based on inference or ascription methods.

        Update: The above guidance has been superseded by the guidance contained within the *IAB/MRC Audience Reach Guidelines* for general audience measurement and the *MRC Digital Audience-Based Measurement Standards* more specifically for detailed audience measurement, and such guidance should be applied to the attribution of metrics to a specific user across environments. Additionally, future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* will include a discussion around measurement of audience within in-game and as such, further guidance in this area is expected.

6. Inactivity

    a. Pg. 7 – *A continuous game play Session is measured from the start-time of the game-play to the end-time of the game- play, as long as the in-game measurement organization does not encounter inactivity (player idle) exceeding 60 minutes, which will terminate the Session.*

    b. Pg. 8 – *Ad exposures recorded during periods of inactivity (player idle) exceeding ten (10) minutes shall not contribute to valid ad impressions (post threshold and retroactively during the idle period back to the last activity recorded). As noted above, inactivity periods extending sixty (60) minutes will terminate the game- play Session.*

    c. *Pg. 11 – 3.1.5 Session Definition and Inactivity Thresholds – Valid ad impressions and other measurement metrics reported by the in-game measurement organization should*

be controlled and segregated by game Session. Session definition and control helps to ensure that the User (or Users if multiple simultaneous exposures to the same ad message are a game design feature) remains the same for impression accumulations.

Significant periods of game inactivity will terminate the Session assumption. Specifically, an inactivity period equal to or longer than sixty (60) minutes will terminate the game play Session. This 60-minute inactivity threshold may be adjusted in the future pending further study of the activity patterns of in-game Users.

> **Update:** Updated guidance around the identification and treatment of inactive sessions has been issued as part of the IAB/MRC *Mobile Application (In-App) Advertising Measurement Guidelines*, and the guidance contained within that document supersedes the above and is applicable to certain aspects of in-game measurement. In addition, future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* will include a discussion around inactive sessions within in-game and as such, further guidance in this area is expected.

7. Offline measurement

    a. *Pg. 7 – In-Game transaction records, which contain evidence of advertising exposure, can be derived and transmitted to the in-game measurement organization: (1) on a real-time basis during on-line game-play, (2) in batched groups that are transmitted periodically during an on-line game-play Session, or (3) first stored during off-line game-play and later transmitted during subsequent on-line Sessions (not necessarily associated with game play) of the applicable User device, if appropriate authentication and minimum timing from play to data collection is present. To consider an ad impression valid, the timing of the served ad must be included within the campaign reporting period and must be prior to billing for that period based on the pre-determined billing cycle.*

    b. *Pg. 11 – 3.1.4 Deferred Impressions – In-game advertising exposure events can be captured and measured for game play that occurs both on-line or off-line (and stored). Valid ad impressions can be measured and reported in either type of playing environment or both.*

    Ad impressions resulting from off-line, stored and later transmitted activity (herein called "deferred" impressions) must have occurred within the campaign reporting period. Also, the ad impression must have occurred before the final bill for the campaign period, based on the pre-determined billing schedule. Thereafter, this activity should be considered expired.

    Deferred Ad Impressions must meet the minimum time of exposure and quality parameters specified within this guideline, similar to on-line impressions.

Update: Updated guidance around the measurement of offline Impressions has been issued as part of the IAB/MRC *Mobile Application (In-App) Advertising Measurement Guidelines*, and the guidance contained within that document supersedes the above and is applicable to certain aspects of in-game measurement. In addition, future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* may include a discussion regarding offline measurement within in-game and as such, further guidance in this area is expected.

8. Reach and Frequency

    a. Pg. 13 – *3.2. Reach – The in-game measurement organization can provide a measure of ad-impression reach, which is the accumulation of unique game Client-Users over a reporting period. Procedures for identifying a unique game Client-User should be specified and disclosed based on client-side game activity using registration or other forms of heuristics.*

        Measurement guidelines for reach metrics will be the subject of future guideline initiatives by the IAB and MRC.

    b. Pg. 13 – *3.3. Frequency – The in-game measurement organization can provide a measure of ad-impression frequency, which is the accumulation of valid ad-impressions over time to the average unique game User. The frequency reporting time-period should be fully disclosed, and the nature of the ad-impression accumulation method such as duplicated or unduplicated by game Session and game User (over the reporting period) should be fully disclosed.*

        It is strongly recommended that frequency measurements containing both on-line and off-line exposed ad impressions fully disclose that fact. The reported frequency resulting from off-line exposed ad impressions should have an associated measurement of average time from play to transmission for the reported counts, with the method for determining the average also fully disclosed.

        Update: The above guidance has been superseded by the guidance contained within the *IAB/MRC Audience Reach Guidelines* for general frequency measurement and the *MRC Digital Audience-Based Measurement Standards* more specifically for detailed frequency measurement, and such guidance should be applied to frequency measurement across environments. Additionally, future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* will include a discussion around measurement of frequency within in-game and as such, further guidance in this area is expected.

9. Disclosures

    a. Pg. 13 – *Aggregation methods used to collect and summarize records of game-play activity from a Client-User and across Client-Users for a reporting period should be specified and fully disclosed. Reasonable internal controls should be present to prevent*

the loss, duplication or unintended alteration of game play activity. The nature of the data captured for game-play records (specific fields with descriptions) should be disclosed.

b. Pg. 13 – *Editing, ascription, attribution or other data adjustment techniques should be specified and fully disclosed.*

c. Pg. 13 – *Other measurement limitations that may be present during game-play such as abandonment, pop-up blockers, modified browser attributes, cached activity, etc., should be fully disclosed where applicable.*

d. Pg. 15 – *6. Disclosure Guidance – An organization's methodology for accumulating In-Game measurements should be fully described and accessible to users of the data.*

Specifically, the nature of In-Game measurements, the methods of sampling used (if applicable), data collection methods employed, data editing procedures or other types of data adjustment or projection, calculation explanations, reporting standards (if applicable), reliability of results (if applicable), and limitations of the data should be included in the disclosure.

> **Update:** Disclosure-related matters such as the examples above should follow the guidance within the *MRC Minimum Standards* and applicable IAB/MRC measurement guidelines, as applicable. However, we understand that aspects of the above guidance may be topics that are specific to in-game, thus requiring specific guidance. As such, future updates to the *In-Game Guidelines* will include discussions around specific additional disclosure requirements for in-game, and further guidance in this area is expected.

10. Specific In-Game Requirements

a. Pg. 8 – *In-Game Measurement Organizations that accumulate ad exposures in calculating Ad Impressions may establish and disclose a "Cool Off Period." While not required under these guidelines, a Cool Off Period is a period of time that occurs after a valid Ad Impression, in which additional exposures may not be accumulated toward another valid Ad Impression.*

For instance, an In-Game Measurement Organization may establish a 20-second cool off period that occurs after each valid Ad Impression (i.e., after 10 seconds of exposure). To illustrate how this example would be applied, a 60-second period of continuous exposure to an ad would result in two (2) Ad Impressions (a 10- second period for the first ad impression, followed by a 20-second cool off period; and then another 10-second period resulting in the second ad impression, followed by another 20-second cool off period).

Cool off periods may relate to Frequency Cap thresholds, which are discussed in greater detail in Sec. 3.1.7 of these guidelines.

Update: The above guidance issued as part of the *In-Game Guidelines* can be considered guidance that is specific to the in-game environment and has not been superseded to date by other guidance issued by IAB/MRC. As indicated above, MRC plans to conduct a comprehensive update to the *In-Game Guidelines* and this process will include further discussion in the above areas. As such, further and updated guidance in those areas is expected.

Links to the *MRC Minimum Standards* and other industry-specific guidance issued by MRC/IAB and referenced above can be found here:
http://www.mediaratingcouncil.org/MRC%20Standards%20Listing%2003-10-20.pdf

Please contact Ron Pinelli (rpinelli@mediaratingcouncil.org) or Laris Oliveri (loliveri@mediaratingcouncil.org) at MRC with any questions.