



Is Last-Click Attribution About To Become A Thing Of The Past?

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Attribution has always been an issue for ROI-based Internet campaigns. Historically, ad servers have been programmed to credit attribution for a sale, download or other action to the last click from the IP address. This works to the advantage of the search engines and may, in fact, be a primary factor in the high valuation of Google. The system works like this. When a campaign uses a third-party ad server (3PAS), the computer is cookie'd when an ad is served to the browser. Then, whether or not there is a direct click to the directed site or whether the consumer goes there later, the cookies is referenced and attribution given to the last site and ad the consumer was exposed to. When sites or networks serve the ads, each one of them can claim attribution if they "see" the consumer. That's why 3PAS makes sense, to dedupe and give credit to the true last view or click. Historically, the networks, especially when a CPA deal was involved, served their own ads rather than have them served by the agency 3PAS. This presented problems, as the networks would try to set things up so that they saw the maximum number of uniques and could claim the maximum bounty for those visiting the clients' site. Attribution claims under this kind of setup would sometimes exceed the total volume garnered by the client. Enter the Universal Action Tag created by Atlas and a similar product from DoubleClick that enabled all ads to be served from the same server.

But the last-click problem continued. Here's an example of why last click as sole attribution is broken: This is from a case study example provided by dgm at the iMedia Agency Summit in Hunter Valley Australia in September. The client had a search effort garnering 3,000 customers a month at a \$40 CPA. They had 1,000 customers from the Web at a \$130 CPA. Other efforts like affiliate and email had a \$60-90 CPA, garnering 2300 customers a month. The client directed the agency to cut the "expensive" Web CPA sites. Agency did so, getting it down to \$100. The 1,000 customers dropped to 650. The 2,300 dropped to 2,080. The 3,000 in search dropped to 2,250. Overall volume dropped by 21%.

Net, net: Web banners, even though they have a higher CPA, enable the overall scaling of a campaign to higher volume. When they took away key sites that contributed to the branding of the advertising, fewer people knew about the offer, and fewer went to search.

Enter companies like Blackfoot and Theorem and their tests with what Publicis, Theorem and we at Mediasmith call Multiple Attribution Protocol. These tests, run last year, resulted in agency demand for Atlas and DoubleClick to push up product development and provide reporting of ALL impressions served to a consumer and all actions taken before the last action. DoubleClick is currently in beta with this service, which the company calls Exposure to Conversion reporting. Atlas expects to release its product, called Advanced Conversion Attribution, in Q1. At OMMA last month, we had a lively panel on this topic that included Dave Falk from DC, Scott Baker from Atlas and Jay Kulkarni from Theorem. The news is encouraging.

From an industry standpoint, we look forward to the maturation of these products and work toward the algorithms that will help us assign credit more properly across all of the touchpoints of a campaign. While this may take some of the bloom off search, it should be a boon to all digital advertising, as clients are able to more readily identify actual consumer behavior prior to purchase. These concepts can then be transferred over to other media as they become digitally enabled.

Farewell, last click. Hello, MAP. And welcome. We have been waiting for you. Now go to work.



About the Author

David L. Smith, CEO of Mediasmith, is an internationally known expert in the areas of new media application, media strategy, media planning and metrics, and has a number of awards to his name including an Effie and an ad:tech Individual Achievement award. Trained in the major agency media department environment, he has been in the independent media service field since 1978 when he founded Mediasmith. Smith is a pioneer in the application of computers in media, deployment of interactive advertising and media metrics. His experience ranges from participating in the creation and early usage of the first generation of advertising technology (housekeeping systems, data sources) to the current issues facing the use of metrics in the digital marketplace. He has been at the forefront of new metrics applications, with major involvement on the AAAAs, ARF, OPA and IAB national committees working to establish and refine standards in metrics, business practices and financial issues for interactive advertising. Smith has also contributed his knowledge through articles and interviews in an extensive range of media over the past two decades. He is a regular speaker at Industry events including iMedia, @d:tech, OMMA and others and writes regularly for a number of industry publications and Web sites including iMediaConnection and MediaPost. His advisory board involvement includes OPA, IAB, comScore/Media Metrix, AdEx and a number of start-up private companies. A University of Washington graduate, Smith is married with a seventeen-year-old son; plays guitar; and is a gourmet Chinese cook. You'll find him at the office early most mornings unless he is traveling with his family.

About Mediasmith

Mediasmith is a recognized leader in digital media planning and buying. We specialize in the integration of traditional and digital media, media consulting, search, and audience development with a rapidly growing practice in emerging technologies and their applications. We architect plans across all media, in all markets, in virtually all product categories utilizing the right combination of media options to help our clients grow in the increasingly fractured media environment; from planning and buying, to tracking, optimization, and reporting of ROI on all media efforts. Mediasmith remains dedicated to the evolution and standardization of digital media practices. As committed innovators, we test the latest in metrics and analytics, providing solutions that enable us to act as a catalyst for our clients' media innovations.