

## Let's tackle digital's next hurdle: Transparency

### By BPA Worldwide

Hardly a day goes by without some media coverage and commentary about the issues of online ad fraud and ad viewability. Both are very much intertwined and critical issues for digital media. and as you dive deeper into these issues, you come away feeling like you need to take a shower.

But while these problems need to be solved, what we should really be talking about now is moving on to the next critical step in the evolution of digital. That is full transparency—a clean and open book on web sites' traffic and visitors.

We need to enter an era in which the best sites choose to roll out a wealth of data regarding everything about their readers. This may sound like a radical notion. It is not. Great magazines have a long tradition of using audited audience data and readership research as competitive tools to take business away from lesser rivals. It's good business. It always has been and still is.

What's lacking is not the data—digital offers a wealth of data points—but an appreciation on the part of web publishers of just how powerful that sort of data can be in winning business.

Unless one is intentionally hiding something, transparency works to the benefit of any media property – digital, print and even face-to-face. It is a key attribute to building a trusted media brand.

It's certainly needed.. In conversations with media buyers, there seems to be general acceptance of digital metrics, but there is also an undercurrent of suspicion about not getting the whole story.

Publishers can address this by:

- \*Fully disclosing comprehensive metrics

- \* Being open about the tools being used to combat fraud and improve ad viewability.

Let's look at some particulars.

A common metric for buying online advertising has long been the impression. Now the stakes have been raised and ad viewability is becoming the baseline for buys.

But publishers have so much more to offer. They can report on time on screen, engagement with ad, and platform type to confirm performance.

For metrics that outperform industry averages, publishers may have the opportunity to develop premium pricing while buyers get assurance for the quality of an audience reached.

But there are other digital media channels as well, including digital magazines, e-newsletters and webinars, just to name a few. Each channel has its own—and sometimes similar—metrics that are used to judge audience activity and relevance for media buyers looking to place advertising.

For digital magazines and e-newsletters, it may not be sufficient to simply cite distribution totals when open rates are an important metric. According to one media buyer, "I usually have to ask

for the open rate because it is rarely volunteered.” For a seller, wouldn’t a proactive and—wait for it—*transparent* approach that brings open rate into the discussion at the outset likely lead to greater trust of the brand in question and a more positive conclusion?

Online event metrics such as those used for webinars can also benefit from transparency that can facilitate a buy/sell transaction. Often, audience is presented as those who registered rather than those who actually attended. Should a buyer interpret this as an evasive maneuver, the seller may unnecessarily suffer from lack of trust.

The fact is that in an age of almost-instant access to information, it is very likely potential buyers already know the answers to the questions they are asking. Upfront transparency at the beginning of the sales conversation might be something quite unexpected – and much appreciated – on your way to successfully closing the deal.

In his book, [The Naked Corporation](#), Don Tapscott explains at length how corporations across many industries have seized on transparency not as a challenge but as an opportunity. He sums it up nicely by saying, “Transparency is revolutionizing every aspect of our economy and its industries and forcing firms to rethink their fundamental values. If you have to be naked, you had better be buff.”

To that I would add, transparency – be it a print, digital or face-to-face marketing platform -- fosters trust and trust is a key ingredient for any successful business relationship. With all the dynamic data digital media can provide, transparency can become a competitive advantage for those who embrace it.