



Attribution Management Buyer's Guide

Prepared for Online Marketers

ATTRIBUTION MANAGEMENT BUYER'S GUIDE

Attribution Management is the process of tracking, assembling and properly valuing the entire team of online ads and marketing initiatives that lead to a sale or conversion. Attribution Management is a foundational component of any robust advertising analytics platform. Proper attribution allows marketers to accurately measure, improve and optimize the profit and ROI generated from their cross-media advertising investments.

Given the critical nature of attribution management to advertising analytics, we have created this Attribution Management Buyer's Guide for marketers to use when selecting an advertising analytics and optimization platform. The Guide is intended to highlight key attribution management features and functionality that should be available in any advertising analytics solution you select.

The following represents a categorized list of the major features, functions and capabilities that are critical to effective and accurate attribution management.

1. **Attribution Variables** - The key metric(s) by which your advertising analytics solution values conversions and attributes credit across the participating team of ads.
 - a. Can your solution attribute Profit, Revenue, and Orders across the ads? Does it provide other attribution metrics?

THE BEST ANSWER: Ideally, an attribution management system will track revenue, profit and order attribution simultaneously. Of the three, the ability to attribute profit is the most accurate and most important attribution variable. As a follow-up, ask the vendor how they calculate profit. In order to be truly accurate, they should be incorporating your cost of goods sold and cost of advertising into their calculation.

2. **Products** – The specific products or services that were sold as a result of a team of ads.
 - a. Does the solution show the actual products/services that were sold by order, or do you just report that an order occurred along with the revenue it produced?

THE BEST ANSWER: True attribution-based analytics platforms are able to track and value the actual products or services that were sold. This means they're able to accurately calculate the profit per order, and perform profit attribution, which is the ideal attribution variable to be used.

3. **Ad Sources Tracked** – The various advertising media that are involved in influencing the various stages of the sale or conversion.
 - a. Which ad sources does your system track?
 - b. Do you place tracking code on my website?
 - c. Do you get all of your data from the APIs of the ad sources?
 - d. Do you track direct and organic visits to my site as well?

THE BEST ANSWER: A foundational requirement for attribution management is the ability to track across all online ad sources, not just paid search. And the ability to do that requires your advertising analytics platform to use its own tracking code, instead of relying on the limited information provided through search engine APIs. While the search engine APIs do provide some valuable management information, the data is inadequate when it comes to tracking, classifying and accurately attributing value to the team of ads that led to the sale or conversion.

4. **Banner Advertising** – Banner (or display) advertising appears on web pages in many forms and can be simply viewed on a web page or clicked on and taken to a more detailed landing page.
 - a. Are you able to report on banner impressions (view-throughs) in addition to banner clicks, or is it just banner clicks?
 - b. If you can track banner impressions, which ad servers/networks does that work with?

THE BEST ANSWER: If you are doing banner advertising, it is a must that you select an attribution management vendor that has the ability to incorporate banner view-throughs. Why? Because it is inaccurate to measure a banner's effectiveness in the same manner you would measure the effectiveness of a pay-per-click (PPC) ad. A banner ad can have influence even if no click occurs; therefore, preferred attribution management systems should be able to incorporate banner view-throughs and banner clicks in their attribution management offering.

5. **Exclusions** – Certain ads clicked on in a purchase path may be solely for navigational purposes and therefore, might best be “excluded” from receiving any conversion credit.
 - a. Does your technology provide the ability to exclude giving attribution credit to specific user-selected types of ads, organic and direct visits, even if they are tracked as part of a larger Purchase Path?



THE BEST ANSWER: Certain types of ads at certain stages of the buying cycle, like ad ads at the end of the buying cycle that use your company name, are sometimes merely serving as a navigation vehicle to your website—not as a true 'influencer' in the path to conversion. Ensure that you're giving credit to ads involved in the sales process—not the navigation process—and your attribution calculations will be more accurate. Look for a vendor that offers the ability to exclude clicks that shouldn't receive credit.

6. **Purchase Path Stages** – Purchase path stages represent specific consideration steps in the overall buying process that a consumer goes through in route to a purchase.
 - a. How does your system report on which ads do a great job of introducing people to my business, closing deals, or being an ad that sits in between the two and influences the buying behavior?

THE BEST ANSWER: Now that you are valuing ads regardless of where they occur in the customer buying cycle, it will be important for you to be able to identify and differentiate which specific ads introduce your brand to the customer, which ads influence their buying decision, and which ads close the sale. This information helps you pinpoint how certain ads are having a positive influence on customers in the beginning or middle of the buying cycle versus those at the end that close deals.

An additional benefit of working with a vendor that determines the effectiveness of all relevant ads along the purchase path is that, like most companies starting out in attribution, you will find you have many ads that close deals, but very few that wield influence during the early part of the buying cycle. This type of information highlights opportunities to invest in ads that are effective influencers in the early or middle parts of the buying cycle.

7. **Time** – There are numerous time considerations that impact how proper attribution is applied across the team of ads that lead to a sale or conversion.
 - a. How is time factored in your tool's attribution models?
 - b. What kind of flexibility do I have?
 - c. Can you tell me the time from first ad to conversion? Last ad to conversion?
 - d. Can you tell me the time between ad clicks, ad impressions, direct visits, and organic visits in the Purchase Path?
 - e. How long do your cookies last?
 - f. How do I know the appropriate window of time to give credit back to an ad?

THE BEST ANSWER: The ideal attribution management solution should flexibly leverage time as one of the key attribution attributes. Specifically, the solution should allow you to tell the time from first and last click to conversion. It should also be able to measure intervals between all clicks in the Purchase Path. This data coupled with the ability to set an appropriate time window to apply attribution, will allow you to more accurately attribute proper credit back to the ads that really contributed to the sale.

In addition, the cookie that the vendor provides should optionally be configurable to last for much greater than 30 days, and it should renew each time that person visits the website.

The ideal attribution management vendor should allow you to easily see the time from first ad to conversion, last ad to conversion, and the time between each ad. The cookie that the vendor provides should last for much greater than 30 days and should renew each time that person visits the website.

8. **Basic Attribution Models** – Basic attribution models, if rationally applied, can improve the accuracy of your conversion attribution and ultimately improve the performance of your online campaigns.
 - a. What kind of basic attribution models does your platform offer?
 - b. Can you verify that using these base attribution models will improve my accuracy and performance?

THE BEST ANSWER: A robust attribution platform should be able to offer basic attribution models out of the box including:

- **Even** – where conversion credit is spread equally across all participating ads in the Purchase Path
- **Even with Exclusions** – the even model with the additional ability to exclude specific ads, such as Branded terms, at the end of the Purchase Path
- **Custom** - the ability to assign specific percentages to participating ads based on whether they are an introducer, influencer or closer

An experienced attribution management provider should be able to provide you with case studies or examples of how these basic models were able to increase the accuracy of conversion valuation and ultimately how that was able to lead to improvement, as measured by increased profit and/or ROI.

9. **Custom Attribution** – Custom attribution represents the ability to set specific attribution percentages to various stages and/or specific ads in the buyer’s purchase path.
- What kind of customization options do you offer?
 - Do you offer any consultative services that can build custom attribution models?

THE BEST ANSWER: Moving beyond an Even attribution or an Even with exclusions model requires an understanding of some complex mathematics. Setting custom attribution rules should not be a subjective exercise and should only be taken on by attribution management vendors with solid statistical and mathematical knowledge. Custom models should be able to include variables like the decay rate of different types of ads, the influence potential of different types of ads, additional time variables, types of products sold, type of customer, impact of social media, etc.

10. **Data Warehousing** – Capturing a rich blend of purchase, product, media source, ad specific and other related data in a data warehouse can build a powerful marketing intelligence asset for your company.
- Does your technology reside on a data warehouse?
 - Do you offer a data warehouse as an option?
 - Can the warehoused data be queried to create custom reports?

THE BEST ANSWER: Any attribution management system that is built upon a data warehouse will provide you with much greater flexibility in building custom models and custom reports. Vendors that offer this option recognize that by doing so, you will be able to go back much further in time to leverage historical data and build more accurate models going forward.

Conclusion

Sophisticated marketers are keenly aware of the importance of Attribution Management in accurately measuring and improving the performance of their cross-media advertising campaigns. The challenge for these marketers is to find a robust advertising analytics platform that is built on a foundation of attribution management. Hopefully, this Guide will help you assess whether the solution you're considering measures up to the robust requirements of an effective attribution management platform.

Want to get more involved in attribution management? We invite you to become a member of the Attribution Management Forum, an online group that represents more than 300 leading marketers from a diverse range of companies across nearly every industry segment. For more information on joining, or for additional information on Attribution Management, visit us online at AttributionManagement.com or ClearSaleing.com.