

OUT-OF-HOME (OOH) ADVERTISING QUANTIFIED:

TURNING VISIBILITY INTO VERIFIABLE
OUTCOMES

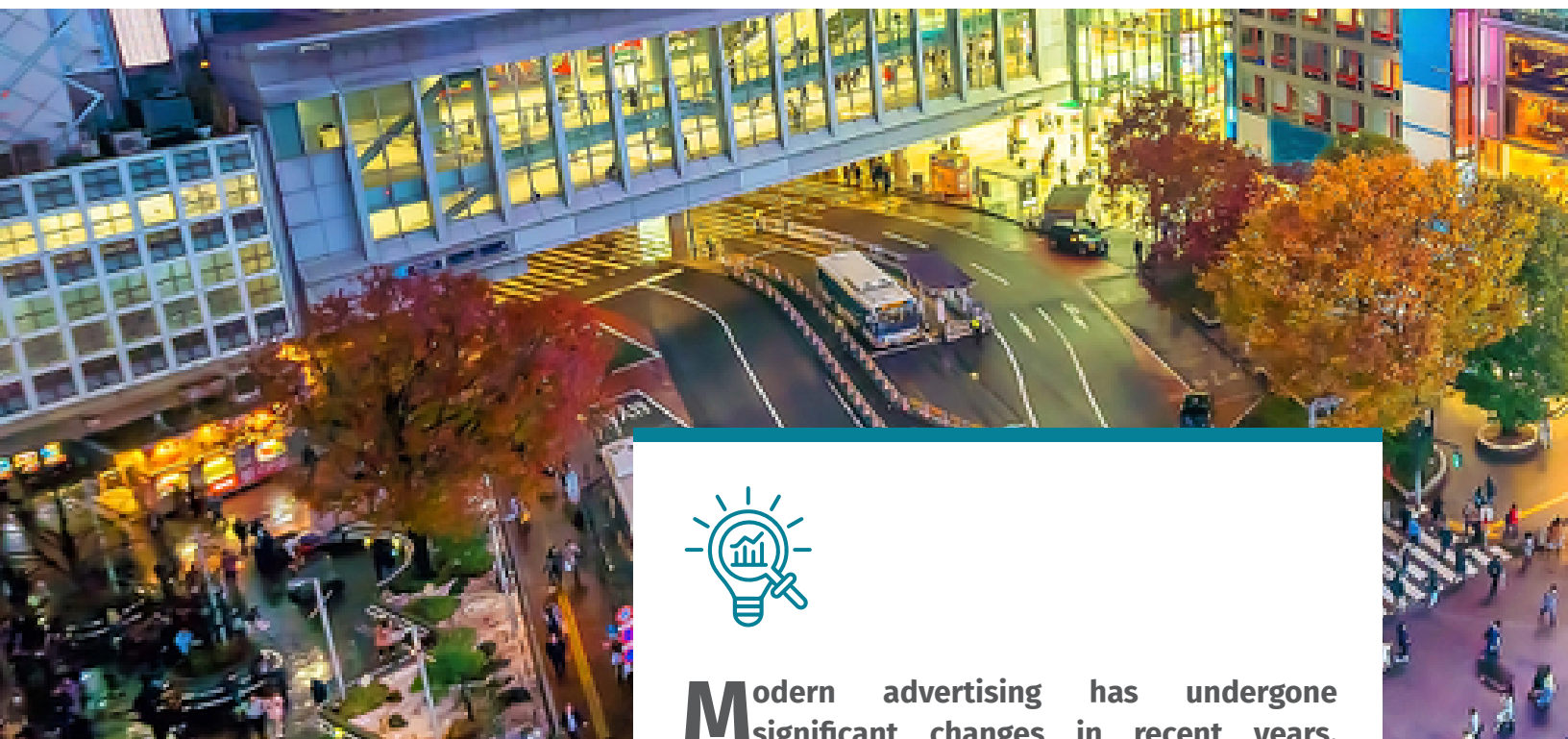
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While OOH advertising has long been seen as hard to measure, new data and technology are changing that. This article explores the challenges, debunks myths, and shows how ABCS Insights is redefining OOH impact measurement.

Modern advertising has undergone significant changes in recent years, making impressive strides in measurement, tracking, and demonstrating clear ROI. Yet, some channels still carry the label "hard-to-measure," since connecting them directly to specific outcomes has always been tricky. Channels like Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising, in particular, have traditionally struggled with precise, one-to-one attribution, leading teams to rethink their role and impact in media strategies.

However, advancements in data, technology, and measurement methodologies are rapidly transforming what "hard-to-measure" really means. In this article, we'll unpack the perceived challenges facing OOH advertising, debunk common myths around measurement and effectiveness, and highlight the innovative approach ABCS Insights is using to redefine how brands can evaluate and optimize the impact of their OOH investments.



What are Hard-to-Measure Channels?

As the name suggests, "hard-to-measure" channels are **marketing avenues** where it has historically been challenging to link customer actions and conversions to specific touchpoints directly. Unlike digital advertising, where every click and interaction is meticulously tracked, these channels often lack built-in measurement tools, making attribution difficult.

Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising is a prime example. OOH covers a wide range of formats that consumers encounter in public spaces, such as:

- Iconic billboards
- Transit advertising (e.g., ads on buses, subways, or trains)
- Street furniture (bus shelters, benches)
- Place-based media (ads inside stores, shopping centers, or gas stations)

Beyond OOH, other marketing efforts traditionally viewed as difficult to measure include public relations (PR), events, native social content, and various forms of content marketing.

Why Some Still Struggle to Measure OOH Effectively

OOH presents a distinct set of measurement challenges that digital channels don't. Unlike media built for clicks and conversions, OOH operates in the physical world, making attribution harder, but not impossible.

Here's what makes it tricky:



One-to-Many Nature

OOH advertising is inherently designed for broad exposure. It's a "one-to-many" medium.

Anyone could walk or drive past a billboard, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly who has been exposed and subsequently taken action.



Lack of Built-in Tracking

As alluded to earlier, offline initiatives, such as billboards and print ads, don't come equipped with built-in tracking mechanisms. Unlike digital channels, which easily capture clicks, views, and conversions, traditional OOH campaigns have historically offered **limited direct visibility into their immediate impact**. The absence of integrated tracking makes it especially challenging to attribute customer actions directly to specific ads.



Higher Standard of Proof

OOH media tends to face stricter measurement demands compared to other channels. For instance, TV ads frequently receive attribution credit simply because the TV was on, regardless of whether the viewer genuinely engaged.

Conversely, OOH ads typically must prove that a viewer actually encountered or interacted meaningfully with the advertisement, which introduces an extra layer of difficulty in validating performance with consistent metrics.



Debunking Myths: OOH is Not What it Used to Be

OOH has long been underestimated, often dismissed as old-school, unmeasurable, or only effective for big-budget brand awareness, but that view is outdated. The reality is that OOH has evolved fast and quietly. It's now a far more dynamic, data-driven, and measurable channel than ever before.

So let's clear up a few lingering myths.

Myth 1: "Billboards are outdated."

The belief that billboards and OOH media are obsolete ignores the significant transformation and growth the industry continues to experience. Far from being outdated, OOH advertising remains one of the few traditional channels **consistently growing in both audience reach and advertising revenue**. Billboards are not only surviving, they are now evolving into highly dynamic advertising platforms.

The primary driver behind this transformation is **Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH)**. Powered by advanced technology and real-time data, DOOH allows brands to connect with audiences through dynamic, responsive content.

Innovations such as geofencing, dynamic impression tracking, real-time analytics, and programmatic digital out-of-home (pDOOH) have transformed billboards and screens into measurable, high-impact marketing tools, effectively addressing historical measurement challenges.

Myth 2: "Only for big brands."

Another persistent myth is that **OOH advertising is reserved exclusively for large corporations**. In reality, modern OOH is increasingly accessible and highly beneficial for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), offering flexibility, affordability, and impressive returns.

Several recent industry advancements have significantly increased the accessibility of OOH advertising, making it a viable option for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs).

- **Self-serve platforms and flexible booking:** These enable SMBs to control their budgets and campaign planning, allowing for targeted, budget-conscious campaigns.
- **Digital formats for hyper-local targeting:** Digital OOH (DOOH) enables short-term, targeted campaigns focused on specific geographic areas or limited-time promotions, making OOH viable even for smaller budgets.
- **Aggregated local screen inventory:** Platforms now connect SMB-operated screens with national advertisers, opening additional revenue streams for smaller venues and enhancing overall accessibility.

Myth 3: "Can't be measured."

Perhaps the biggest misconception is that OOH advertising cannot be accurately measured. This perception is rapidly becoming obsolete, thanks to advancements in analytics, data integration, and cross-channel measurement.

Modern OOH provides:

- **Impression tracking and real-time reporting:** Data is updated frequently, taking into account traffic volume, visibility, population density, campaign duration, and even local weather conditions.
- **Creative testing and optimization:** **A/B testing and content optimization** help advertisers refine messaging and improve campaign outcomes.
- **Advanced attribution methodologies:** Companies like ABCS Insights employ a layered approach that combines geolocation data, mobile IDs, and point-of-sale purchase information to provide a comprehensive view of consumer behavior. This ensures statistically significant measurement even for smaller campaigns, allowing direct comparisons with TV and digital media.

The ABCS Transformative Approach: Layering Data for Unprecedented Insight

ABCS Insights has recognized the opportunity to elevate OOH measurement beyond conventional limitations by tapping into its extensive data assets.

Historically, OOH has struggled with measurement due to its “one-to-many” nature, which makes it hard to identify who was exposed. It’s also held to stricter standards than channels like TV, where ads often get credit even without confirmed viewer attention.

To overcome these barriers, ABCS employs a sophisticated, multi-layered approach to pinpoint audience exposure and subsequent consumer actions, making OOH measurement robust, insightful, and actionable:

- **Geolocation Data and Mobile IDs:** By partnering with location visitation specialists, ABCS leverages geolocation data and mobile IDs to determine which devices were near an OOH ad placement, indicating a clear "opportunity to see." This method also enables detailed foot-traffic attribution, measuring whether ad exposure results in visits to a specific physical location.
- **Integration of Point-of-Sale (POS) Purchase Data:** A significant advantage of ABCS's methodology is its unique ability to connect exposure directly to verified consumer transactions through time-stamped receipts. For instance, if an OOH ad is placed near a gas station, ABCS can verify ad effectiveness by tracking gasoline purchases at that location. This integration provides granular insights into how OOH directly influences consumer buying decisions.
- **Robust Sample Sizes for Smaller Campaigns:** By layering multiple data sources such as geolocation insights, purchase data, and mobile IDs, ABCS achieves statistically significant and actionable measurements, even for smaller-scale OOH campaigns.

Comprehensive Data Layering – The Game Changer

What sets ABCS Insights apart is its ability to layer multiple, high-quality data sources to identify exposed individuals, resulting in larger sample sizes, higher statistical significance, and richer insights than competitors can offer.

- **Geolocation Data:** Through partnerships ABCS uses mobile ID-based geofencing to determine which devices were within proximity of specific OOH ad placements. This is the gold standard for understanding audience exposure and foot traffic patterns—essential for accurate attribution.
- **Rich Purchase Data:** ABCS uses a triangulated approach, combining geolocation data, time-stamped point-of-sale purchases, and vendor data within an experimental design framework to isolate the impact of OOH exposure. Rather than assuming direct causation from individual purchases, ABCS measure incremental sales lift by comparing exposed and control groups. This method helps determine how OOH campaigns influence real-world behavior, even in complex, high-traffic environments like gas stations or retail aisles.

- **Third-Party Mobile IDs:** By integrating mobile IDs from OOH vendors, ABCS further expands sample size and reach, an area where many other measurement providers fall short. Many measurement providers struggle to integrate third-party mobile IDs from OOH vendors because they rely on narrower, single-source data streams often focused only on their panels or limited partnerships. ABCS, on the other hand, builds its methodology around layered, multi-source data integration to increase sample size and improve attribution accuracy in ways others can't replicate.
- **Experimental Design Methodology:** ABCS applies the same exposed vs. matched control group methodology used for digital and TV campaigns. This consistent lift-based framework allows teams to make apples-to-apples comparisons across all channels using rigorous, proven metrics.
- **Full-Funnel Measurement:** ABCS delivers end-to-end measurement across the entire marketing funnel, eliminating the need to piece together insights from multiple sources.
 - **Upper Funnel (Awareness & Intent):** Survey-based studies measure brand recall and intent.
 - **Mid-Funnel (Traffic & Engagement):** Foot traffic attribution shows whether OOH exposure leads to visits to advertisers' physical locations (e.g. store or restaurant).
 - **Lower Funnel (Conversions & Sales):** ABCS directly ties ad exposure to purchases. This data is particularly effective when placements are near the point of sale. [68% of consumers report purchasing after seeing a billboard](#), especially those with a clear digital call-to-action.
- **Measuring Walled Gardens (e.g., Social Media & YouTube):** ABCS's household meter panel includes opted-in users with browser extensions and mobile apps, enabling passive tracking across platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube. This allows ABCS to measure downstream engagement from OOH campaigns that prompt social action, such as a QR code on a billboard leading to a branded TikTok challenge, or a campaign hashtag driving Instagram interactions.
- **Consultative, Custom-Fit Approach:** Beyond the data, ABCS works closely with clients to define campaign objectives and measurement priorities. This includes tailored analyses such as regional breakdowns, performance by format type (e.g., bus shelters vs. billboards), or specific media planning cuts, ensuring insights are not only accurate but also actionable.

Opportunities and Impact of Modern OOH and Comprehensive Measurement

Modern Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising, empowered by sophisticated measurement tools, is undergoing a dramatic shift—from being seen as a “hard-to-measure” awareness tactic to a data-rich, performance-driven channel that rivals digital in both insight and impact.

Here's how today's OOH is redefining its role in the media mix:

1. Elevating OOH's Role: From Awareness to Sales Impact

OOH has traditionally been viewed as a top-of-funnel driver—great for reach, but hard to tie to results. That's no longer the case. With consistent methodology and layered data inputs, ABCS can isolate and quantify the incremental impact of OOH on real-world behavior, whether it's foot traffic, conversions, or sales lift. That means OOH is no longer just about reach or awareness. It can now be measured, compared, and valued alongside other tangible metrics that have been gathered.

2. High Reach, High Recall

OOH reaches people where they live, move, and make decisions. A single, well-placed billboard in an urban area can reach up to 100,000 people a day, while national campaigns drive millions of weekly impressions. Digital formats (DOOH) enhance this even further, [delivering up to 60% more impressions than static ads](#) thanks to dynamic content rotation and animations.

ABCS brand lift norms indicate that DOOH ads generate 54% higher gains in ad recall compared to benchmarks across all media types.

3. Strong ROI and Cost-Effectiveness

According to the ABCS Insights normative database, the median iROAS for OOH campaigns is \$2.61 (N=91), and \$2.00 for DOOH (n=14).

4. Action-Oriented Results - DOOH Drives Behavior

Digital OOH isn't just eye-catching, it's action-driving.

[76% of recent DOOH viewers have taken action.](#)

[Nearly half \(49%\) say DOOH makes them more likely to act.](#)

[74% of mobile users took action on their phones after seeing a DOOH ad.](#)

5. Seamless Synergy with Digital Channels

OOH doesn't just complement digital—it significantly improves its performance. According to the ABCS Insights normative database, digital campaigns alone deliver a median incremental return on ad spend (iROAS) of \$1.11. But when OOH is added, the median iROAS jumps to \$2.00—an 80% lift. OOH on its own delivers a strong median iROAS of \$2.61 (N=91), making it one of the most efficient channels measured. By bridging the physical and digital worlds—and supported by smart tracking via QR codes, URLs, and social media handles—OOH supercharges campaign results across channels.

Resonance with Younger Demographics

Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) is proving especially effective at reaching younger, urban audiences, offering not just visibility, but favorability, trust, and real-world engagement that leads to action.

- **High Favorability and Action Rates:** DOOH consistently indexes the highest among Gen Z, Millennials, men, urbanites in cities with over 1 million residents, and public transit users. 73% of these groups view DOOH favorably, outpacing other formats, such as video, print, and social media. That favorability translates into behavior, with 76% of recent DOOH viewers taking action after seeing an ad; younger, mobile-first audiences are the most likely to engage.
- **Social Media Synergy:** OOH ads that include influencer tie-ins or social handles drive online interaction. Two-thirds of adults have encountered social elements in OOH, and 52% say it makes them more likely to engage online. Notably, 48% agree that OOH influences their social media behavior, especially in Gen Z and multicultural audiences.

Strategic Planning and Optimization

OOH is no longer a static buy; it has now evolved into a responsive, data-informed media channel capable of real-time decision-making, creative agility, and performance tracking.

Modern OOH planning starts with defining what success looks like. Whether the goal is awareness, engagement, or conversions, clear KPIs allow for tailored strategies and measurable outcomes. ABCS and similar partners help align objectives with the right mix of media formats, locations, and measurement frameworks.

In-Flight Optimization - Adapting in Real Time

What makes today's OOH campaigns different is their ability to evolve in-flight:

- Advertisers can update creative mid-campaign based on A/B testing results or performance insights, replacing underperforming assets with more effective messaging or visuals.
- More advanced audience tactics such as purchase-based audiences are now available for OOH activation.
- Programmatic DOOH (pDOOH) enables dynamic, in-context delivery, allowing advertisers to optimize campaigns in real time and adapt to shifting conditions without starting from scratch. For brands seeking omnichannel integration, OOH now offers interactive touchpoints, including QR codes and NFC tags, as well as social handles and smart URLs, which bridge physical visibility with digital engagement. These elements not only enhance attribution but also strengthen continuity across the customer journey.



Conclusion: The Measurable Future of OOH

The story of Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising has changed. What was once dismissed as “untrackable” has now emerged as one of the most **strategic, measurable, and future-ready** components of a modern media plan. Our work at ABCS Insights exemplifies this evolution—transforming a historically challenging channel into a robust, full-funnel solution through layered data, experimental design, and rigorous performance analytics.

Today, OOH can credibly stand alongside digital, TV, and retail media, offering tangible proof of effectiveness across every stage of the customer journey, from awareness and intent to foot traffic, sales, and brand equity.

In an era defined by digital saturation, privacy constraints, and the need for real-world connection, OOH delivers something uniquely powerful: trust, visibility, and amplification. It cuts through noise, complements other media, and influences consumers at key moments of decision.

The call to marketers is clear: it’s time to move OOH from the margins of planning to the center of strategy. The future of OOH is not only measurable, but also tangible. It’s meaningful, modern, and built to perform.

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