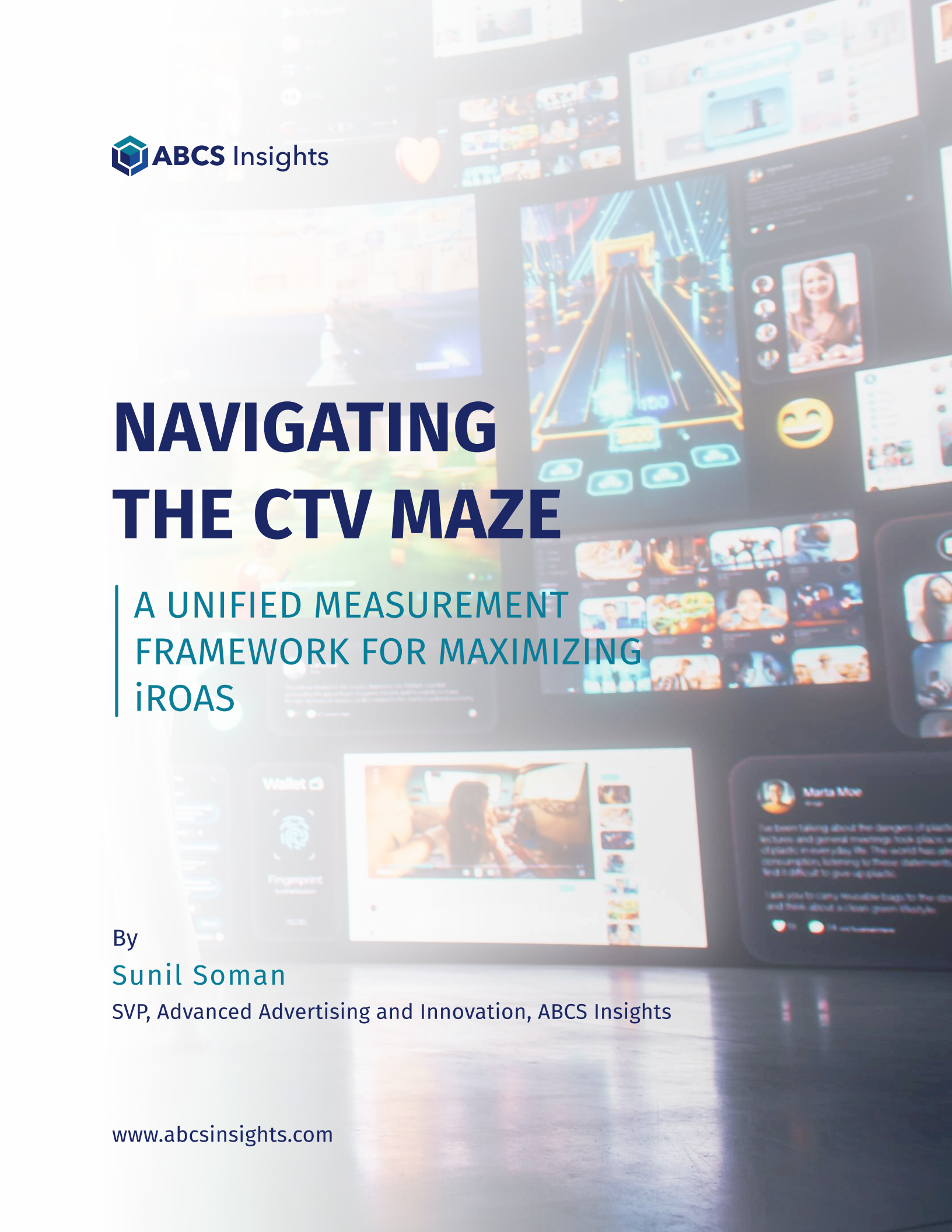
ABCS Insights

NAVIGATING THE CTV MAZE

A UNIFIED MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK FOR MAXIMIZING iROAS



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Introduction: The Measurement Challenge Facing Modern CTV

The CTV landscape is no longer a single channel—it's a sprawling maze of devices, platforms, and signal types, each with its own quirks and limitations. Viewers move fluidly between Hulu, Roku, Amazon Fire TV, gaming consoles, and mobile apps, yet advertisers are still expected to measure performance as if everything happens in one place.

The result is a fragmented ecosystem where impact is difficult to track and even harder to compare, creating a tension between rising ad budgets and stagnating confidence in what's actually working. This paper offers a path forward: a unified measurement framework that cuts through the complexity, restores trust in outcomes, and connects CTV investment directly to business results by prioritizing what truly matters —acquisition, revenue, and long-term impact.

Charting the CTV Ecosystem

Connected TV (CTV) has officially outgrown its experimental phase. Once viewed as a testing ground for digital video budgets, CTV is now a core pillar of the modern media mix, blending the storytelling strength of traditional television with the precision and accountability expected from digital channels.

However, as viewing habits have shifted across smart TVs, streaming devices, and connected consoles, what was once a single channel has evolved into a complex ecosystem.

This fragmentation presents new challenges, including inconsistent signals, mismatched data, and a persistent inability to view performance through a unified lens. For advertisers seeking to scale with confidence, understanding the key varieties of CTV inventory and the measurement pitfalls associated with each is the first step toward building a more innovative, outcome-driven strategy.

Types of CTV Inventory Characteristics and Challenges

CTV Platform / Type	Performance Focus	Key Measurement Challenges
Walled Gardens	Premium environments with brand-safe content or closed-loop performance attribution. Strong storytelling or ROI-focused use cases.	Higher CPMs ($20–$40). Limited targeting flexibility. Smaller advertisers may lack DSP access. Closed ecosystems restrict third-party measurement.
Platform Ecosystems	Broad household reach and strong scale through native OS integration. Often leverages device-level ACR data.	Fragmented inventory. Quality variation. Heavy reliance on proprietary measurement signals and first-party data.
Programmatic CTV (Apps, FAST Channels)	High audience targeting precision and generally lower CPMs ($10–$30). Ideal for cost-effective reach across niche audiences.	Lack of standardized metadata across publishers. High exposure to ad fraud due to complex supply chains and spoofing. Limited show-level targeting.
Technological Infrastructure (All CTV)	CTV as a category is still IP-based, requiring a persistent identity to link exposure across devices and outcomes.	IP churn (frequent address reassignment) disrupts continuity. Cross-device measurement becomes unstable without identity-layering.

IP volatility is one of the most persistent measurement issues in Connected TV, but it doesn't exist in a vacuum. Advertisers also face platform-specific challenges that shape how CTV campaigns perform and how measurement systems interpret results.

Walled Gardens

Walled gardens refer to CTV environments where the publisher controls the entire ad ecosystem. Hulu and Amazon are two prominent examples, offering premium inventory with built-in content safety and rich proprietary data.

Why this matters:

Restricted Access to Signals: These platforms often limit external measurement tools, making it challenging to validate results with independent partners or unify insights across channels.

Attribution Gaps: Due to limited visibility, advertisers may struggle to understand how walled garden impressions contribute to broader performance, mainly when outcomes occur outside that ecosystem.

Pricing Pressure: Higher CPMs demand more substantial justification for spend, but a lack of transparency can make it challenging to assess cost-effectiveness.

The Solution: Advertisers working in walled gardens should push for platform-native metrics tied to tangible business outcomes. They can also now work with third-party measurement companies to obtain an independent view of performance, as new measurement solutions have emerged that don't require walled garden cooperation.

Platform Ecosystems

Platform ecosystems, such as Roku or Samsung, operate more like infrastructure providers than individual content publishers. They control the operating system, which can enable access to valuable tools like ACR (Automatic Content Recognition) and household-level identifiers.

Why this matters:

Fragmented Inventory: Ecosystems often mix their own inventory with third-party apps, which can have inconsistent metadata, ad quality, and brand safety standards.

Siloed Insights: Since ecosystems often rely on proprietary analytics, advertisers struggle to integrate results into a unified, cross-channel view.

Limited Interoperability: Measurement tools that work well in one ecosystem may not be supported or may behave differently in another, making standardization difficult.

The Solution: Brands should map out where their impressions are actually running within these ecosystems, separating owned and operated from partner inventory.

Programmatic CTV

Programmatic CTV covers everything from FAST channels and niche streaming apps to DSP-based ad buying across open exchanges. It promises precision targeting and scalable reach at a lower cost, but also introduces the highest risk of measurement breakdown.

Why this matters:

Verification Vulnerabilities: Inconsistent standards and a lack of transparency across supply paths increase the likelihood of ad fraud, spoofing, or invalid traffic (IVT).

Signal Pollution: IVT can contaminate conversion signals, making performance optimization unreliable and damaging CRM quality downstream.

Measurement Blind Spots: Without standardized metadata and clean inventory labeling, advertisers may not know where or alongside which content their ads are appearing.

The Solution: Advertisers should implement strict supply path controls and filter campaigns through verified sellers.

Establishing Performance Norms for Streaming Success

As Connected TV matures, the conversation around measurement has fundamentally shifted. Success is defined by direct business outcomes, measured in terms of revenue, acquisition, and return on investment. CTV, when measured correctly, can now compete with any other performance channel.

Outcome Metrics Over Exposure Metrics

Historically, TV success was measured in Gross Rating Points. These metrics provided estimates of exposure but failed to quantify impact. CTV has changed the baseline.

Modern performance marketers prioritize:

- **Return on Ad Spend (ROAS):** Revenue generated per dollar spent
- **Household Penetration:** The percent of households buying a brand
- **Incremental Trialists:** The number of new-to-brand consumers purchasing the product due to CTV advertising
- **LTV/ARPU:** Lifetime Value / Average Revenue per User
- **Cost Per Acquisition (CPA):** The efficiency of turning impressions into new brand buyers
- **Efficiency:** ARPU / CPA

Benchmarking and Proof of ROI

Having data isn't enough. As more brands shift their budgets into CTV, they need clear norms to evaluate performance. These norms help quantify success, validate investment, and make the case internally for continued or expanded spend.

What best-in-class looks like:

- Performance data from providers like ABCS, which aggregates outcomes across verticals and inventory types, gives advertisers a grounded view of what's typical —and what's exceptional.

Measuring True Incrementality

While a high Return on Ad Spend (ROAS) indicates strong performance, demonstrating that the outcome would not have occurred without media exposure offers a more definitive measure of impact.

Incrementality testing moves beyond correlation to causation, isolating the actual value added by a Connected TV (CTV) campaign. This practice is essential for advertisers seeking to justify CTV investments internally, optimize their budget allocation, and understand how CTV drives outcomes across both digital and physical channels.

1. Robust Matching Against Category Behavior

By comparing results across two cohorts, advertisers can identify the "lift", i.e., the difference in behavior that can be causally attributed to the campaign.

Before establishing exposed and control groups, advertisers must ensure that both cohorts are matched on category-level behaviors—such as historical purchase frequency, spend, and buying cycles. This behavioral grounding prevents bias from naturally heavy buyers, lapsed buyers, or category seasonality that might otherwise distort lift calculations. By aligning groups on real-world shopping patterns, the incrementality test isolates the specific impact of CTV exposure with far greater accuracy.

2. Exposed vs. Control Group Comparison

At its core, incrementality requires a clean A/B test structure (random block design of experiments):

- **Exposed Group:** Viewers who were served the CTV advertisement.
- **Control Group:** A statistically matched audience segment that did not see the ad.

3. Lift Measurement Across Down-Funnel Outcomes

Incrementality focuses on meaningful, business-oriented KPIs. CTV's impact can be measured across several types of lift:

- **Digital Lift:** Increases in website visits, online purchases, or app downloads directly linked to CTV exposure. Filtering for invalid traffic is essential here, as conversion rates for valid impressions are often twice as high.
- **Retail/Offline Lift:** For in-store or CPG-focused campaigns, incrementality reveals the actual effect on foot traffic and sales. Mobile GPS data can be used to connect ad views to in-store visits, while SKU-level data can connect CTV exposure to actual in-store retail purchases.
- **Cross-Channel and Brand Lift:** CTV's influence often extends beyond the platform. Incrementality analysis can reveal how it drives lift in search, social, or brand metrics such as awareness, consideration, and favorability.

4. Incremental ROAS (iROAS): The Clearest Signal of Value

Traditional ROAS calculates total return per dollar spent. Incremental ROAS (iROAS), however, isolates the value created because of the ad (aka causality). It answers the most critical performance question for marketers: what additional revenue was generated that would not have occurred otherwise?

This is made possible by tools such as revenue pixels and closed-loop attribution systems, which connect media exposure directly to transactions. By capturing the exact dollar value associated with purchases from only the exposed group and comparing to a counterfactual control group of what would have happened, iROAS reveals whether a campaign is truly driving profitable growth—and whether it's worth scaling.

The Unified Identity Framework: Solving Attribution in a Cookieless World

Measuring impact in the Connected TV (CTV) ecosystem requires more than collecting impressions or last-click conversions. To truly understand performance, advertisers need a unified measurement system that cuts across platforms, channels, and devices.

Omnichannel, Unified: How CTV Fits into the Bigger Picture

A key strength of the ABCS model is its ability to consolidate all media channels into a single analysis. Instead of treating CTV as its own isolated channel, it's analyzed alongside digital, linear, social, retail, print, audio, and even out-of-home placements.

What That Looks Like in Practice:

- **Unified Attribution:** Traditional linear TV, programmatic CTV, influencer campaigns, and retail media all measured under one framework.
- **Cross-Channel Influence:** CTV is shown to enhance performance in adjacent channels, such as search and social, revealing an amplification effect.
- **Comparable ROI:** With all channels measured consistently, brands can assess return across platforms using a common lens, eliminating guesswork and enabling smarter allocation.

Measuring Both Eyeballs and Outcomes

There's no need to choose between brand and performance. CTV can drive both, and smart measurement should reflect that.

ABCS's system provides simultaneous visibility into **upper-funnel metrics** (such as awareness and reach) and **lower-funnel metrics** (like conversions, trialists and sales). This enables the evaluation of both storytelling power and sales performance in a single report.

How it Works:

Counting Audience Delivery:

Before evaluating outcomes, advertisers must confirm that the campaign delivered the intended audience efficiently and accurately. This includes validating impression delivery, household reach, frequency distribution, and audience composition against the planned target. ABCS's measurement system incorporates census-level exposure data, ensuring that foundational delivery metrics—who was reached, how often, and through which devices—are accurately quantified before any outcome modeling takes place.

Upper and Lower Funnel Lift:

Advanced measurement systems track both brand-level outcomes (like awareness or favorability) and performance metrics (like purchases or sign-ups). This dual tracking is made possible by linking household exposure data with surveys, pixels, and purchase behavior to measure how branding efforts drive real action.

Incremental Reach:

CTV campaigns are evaluated not only for the number of people they reach, but also whether those people are new. Sophisticated identity graphs help flag whether an exposed user was previously targeted through other channels, ensuring media is driving net-new exposure rather than duplication.

Bridging Brand and Sales with Brand Linking

For campaigns where creative messaging matters just as much as media placement, ABCS offers an advanced layer: brand linking.

This method connects **survey-based brand metrics,** such as awareness, consideration, and intent, with **lower-funnel outcomes,** including conversions or in-store sales. It's a bridge between what people say and what they do.

Why This Matters:

- **Rank-Orders Impact:** Reveals which brand signals are most predictive of real sales.
- **Informs Creative Strategy:** Helps marketers and creatives focus on messaging that genuinely drives results.
- **Supports Copy Testing:** Ties brand lift studies directly to business impact, not just perception shifts.

Best Practices for Proactive Optimization and Future-Proofing

Once measurement moves beyond directional signals to precise, attributable outcomes, the bar shifts again. For performance marketers, the real question isn't just whether it's working, but how well, and compared to what else?

As CTV enters the digital performance arena, success is increasingly defined by hard metrics: revenue, cost per acquisition, and incremental lift.

Sales Impact Across All Verticals

While some examples in this report reference CPG use cases, the same measurement principles apply across every major vertical. ABCS quantifies sales impact for almost every product category, including financial services, travel and hospitality, subscription services, QSR, technology, automotive, and more—capturing both online and offline revenue outcomes. This cross-category consistency allows performance marketers in any industry to evaluate CTV's contribution to real business results with the same level of precision and confidence.

The Iterative Approach

The “set it and forget it” model belongs to a different era. Today’s best advertisers run campaigns with a test-and-learn mindset from day one.

How it Works:

- **Live reporting fuels live decisions.** Metrics such as ROAS, CPA, and conversion rates are tracked continuously, enabling mid-flight course corrections.
- **Three key levers—creative, channel, audience—are refined based on performance signals,** not assumptions.
- **Some platforms offer automated optimization,** utilizing machine learning to adjust bid prices, audience weighting, and placements in real-time. These systems pull directly from verified web visits and conversions to maximize impact.
- **Frequency:** One of the most underrated drivers of success is the control of frequency. Serving an ad too often can backfire, leading to ad fatigue and drop-offs. Intelligent reporting enables brands to identify the optimal level of exposure in real-time.

Targeting Based on Behavior, Not Just Demographics

Intelligent segmentation goes beyond age and gender. Instead, it focuses on behavior.

What this means:

- **Behavioral planning** targets individuals based on real-world signals, such as whether someone is actively in the market for a car or researching home insurance.
- **Demographics vary wildly across platforms,** but behavior stays consistent. Planning around behaviors creates consistency and performance parity, even when surface-level data looks different.
- **Segmentation within campaigns** enables brands to compare outcomes across groups—such as lapsed vs. loyal customers or high-intent vs. passive viewers—and optimize each stream accordingly.

Creative Testing As A Growth Engine

The ad creative is what the audience sees, remembers, and acts on. Even with perfect targeting, a weak creative underperforms. That's why high-performing brands treat creative testing as part of the optimization loop.

Best practices:

- **Break down performance by creative version.** Track not just completion rates, but also clicks, conversions, and brand lift.
- **Iterate on calls to action.** Swapping "Learn More" for "Get Started" can double conversion rates if the message resonates more clearly.
- **Integrate interactive cues,** like QR codes, which help bridge the gap between the non-clickable TV experience and a user's phone or desktop.

Protecting the Integrity of Down-Funnel Data

Optimization is only as good as the data on which it's based. Unfortunately, CTV, especially in programmatic environments, is a growing target for fraud. Invalid traffic impacts spend and corrupts your conversion signals, making your CRM data less trustworthy.

Key issues:

- **Fraudsters exploit server-side ad insertion (SSAI),** spoof devices, and hijack ad paths to create fake impressions. Programmatic CTV campaigns using SSAI experience invalid traffic rates that are more than 100% higher than those without it.
- **Invalid traffic drives down real ROI.** Clicks and visits from bots pollute attribution models, skew performance data, and inflate costs.

What to do:

- **Clean your down-funnel data.** Before using conversion events to optimize media, filter out bot traffic from site visits, lead forms, and branded search.
- **Enforce verification standards.** Use only verified supply paths and demand transparency through app-ads.txt, sellers.json, and SupplyChain Object. MRC aligned verification and detailed invalid traffic reporting are table stakes for performance-driven advertisers.
- **Measure the actual real-world sales outcomes.** Measuring real-world sales at retail remains a durable signal of performance even when leading indicators fail.

Future-Proofing Performance

CTV is no longer in its early growth phase. It's scaling rapidly, and with that acceleration comes greater complexity, higher stakes, and increased scrutiny. Brands that outperform in this environment aren't just keeping up—they're building systems designed to adapt in real time.

That means:

- Embedding measurement into campaign strategy from the outset—not as a retrospective add-on.
- Prioritizing data integrity by filtering out invalid traffic and demanding transparent supply paths.
- Treating every campaign as a learning opportunity, with live data feeding continuous optimization.

As CTV becomes a core driver of performance, the question is no longer if it works, but how well, how consistently, and compared to what.

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