ADTECH WORD *prompt*

THIS WEEK'S PROMPT IS "ATTRIBUTION"

JUDY SHAPIRO
CEO engageSimply
@judyshapiro

Attribution, as we all think of it, only came into the picture once digital advertising dominated marketing budgets.

Predigital, measuring marketing ROI simple. P&G's annual brand business reviews, for instance, was a two-page review document with no attribution charts in sight. The only analysis that mattered was the entirety of marketing spend and in-market outcomes. That's it.

The advent of digital media provided advertisers with precise audience intelligence which, ironically, allowed advertisers to evaluate media channels against each other. Superficially, it made sense to invest in high performing media but in practice it launched the great attribution wars with a dizzying array of attribution models; first or last touch, linear, time decay and of course everyone's favorite – the alphabet series of U and W attribution models.

Amidst all the data wrangling which often was more confusing than insightful, one foundational truth was lost. Communications effectiveness is cumulative yet attribution models rank media individually based on performance. Brands should be trained to measure campaign level effectiveness using attribution data to **only** optimize campaigns. Attribution models cannot be the judge or jury of what makes great advertising work.

PAUL KNEGTEN
Legendary Adtech CMO
@pknegten

Why did you buy that shirt you're wearing?

The challenge with attribution is not cookies, it's not deterministic vs. probabilistic models, it's that weird spongy organ that decides whether you do stuff or not.

Let's take the classic, no-question attribution of Paid Search: I want, I search, I click, I buy. But did I buy it because I searched for it or did I search because I wanted to buy it?

I get it, we have to justify our investments, and when you know, you know. Ad runs, sales go up, everybody's happy. The Apple 1984 ad catapulted the computer company into the stratosphere. Or did the ad just come along when demand for Apple was already heading to the stratosphere?

We influence the way people feel about our product in order to increase sales – and sometimes, it's difficult to 'attribute' that to the particular set of pixels we bought at some place and time.

That's okay, doesn't mean we don't do it. But takes commitment and faith to a strategy, beyond some 1x1 pixel firing at some time to reassure us it's working.

ADTECH WORD *prompt*

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ADTECH GOD
Deity of DSPs
@adtechgod

Attribution in marketing?

It's like putting together a really complex puzzle but the puzzle pieces are face down. Dealing with cross-device tracking and data integration is no joke.

Think about how we jump from checking stuff on our phones, to maybe shopping on our laptops, or even leaning back on the sofa and buying stuff through our connected TVs.

Keeping track of this whole mix is super important and complicated. We really need to master this, especially with connected TVs and devices becoming more popular by the day. Getting our heads around tracking people across through their journey is crucial for marketing to make sense.

Now to my favorite: data integrations! That's a whole other ball game. It's like trying to get a bunch of friends from all over the world to plan a trip to Spain together, each one using a different chat app and each friend already consumed 1/4 of a bottle of Vodka. Making sense of all this different data to figure out what customers really want? Tough stuff. Kudos to the people who work on this. I know I don't!

For our industry, nailing these things is key. We have to stay sharp and adapt to these real-life challenges and changes if we want to hit those ROI goals we're all chasing.

PESACH LATTIN
Publisher, ADOTAT
@pesach_lattin

Attribution modeling, tracing its roots back to the early 1900s with print media coupons, has seen a wild ride since the advent of online advertising.

Marketers enthusiastically embraced performance advertising, but Les Binet, head of effectiveness at Adam&EveDDB, reveals that this attribution game is more smoke and mirrors than science.

Binet's wisdom exposes the fallacies underpinning digital attribution. The fallacy of immediacy assumes ads lead to instant conversions, neglecting the long-tail impact of advertising. The fallacy of last-touch attribution oversimplifies the complex path to purchase. The fallacy of first-touch attribution ignores the intricate dance of multiple channels over time. Multi-touch attribution focuses on purchase methods, sidelining what initially sparked interest. Technology bias favors traceable channels, sidelining less trackable interactions.

Binet warns of overreliance on short-term direct response and misinterpretation of attribution data. Inaccuracy plagues digital attribution, with software often misrepresenting results.

In the age of data-driven marketing, trust good research, common sense, and gut instinct over flawed attribution models. Understanding buyer behavior through correlation may yield better results.

As industry insiders increasingly acknowledge the shortcomings of digital attribution, econometrics emerges as a promising alternative for unraveling advertising impact.

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U of DIGITAL

ADTECH WORD *prompt*

aDOtat

THIS WEEK'S PROMPT IS "ATTRIBUTION"

DAVE MORGAN
Founder of Simulmedia
@davemorgannyc

Attribution is one of the most important — and abused — elements of the digital advertising ecosystem. Our industry makes a lot noise about how accurately it can track, calculate and report on digital ad campaigns, but so much of what adtech sellers and platforms actually output today as "attribution" is really just a lot of hype, faux precision and self-embellishment.

Yes. Digital adtech can close the loop on ad targeting, delivery, exposure and consumer actions like clicks, downloads, purchases, and usage in ways that legacy media never could. It is for sure one of the super-powers of our industry.

However, like the traveling snake oil salesmen of more than a hundred years ago, digital ad companies have found buyers so want to believe in the notion of digital ad effectiveness and granular attribution that they are easy "marks" to sell to. Folks love fancy dashboards with multi-level ROAS (return-on-ad-spend) reporting. They love real-time updating. They love fancy talk about custom-fit propensity models and lift calculations.

For sure, one of the biggest reasons that we have tens of billions of waste in the programmatic supply chain is that the buys have been based on souped-up (think falsified) attribution. We had cookie-bombing for many years. Now, we just have black box attribution models that make everyone feel like they are buying amazing campaigns and driving profits. How do we know so much attribution is false? It's easy. If you added up all of the digital ad companies' atria attribution reports over the last year, you would find it bigger than every nation's Gross Domestic Product. Yep. We're talking $Trillions.

JOE ZAPPA
Sharp Pen Media
@joe_zappa

The ability to track consumers across digital properties via technologies like the third-party cookie and mobile ID gave birth to the dream of the so-called 360-degree view of the customer. This dream told marketers that they could fully understand the effectiveness of each marketing dollar.

But that dream is now dead for a few reasons.

1. Privacy changes by Apple, Google, and regulators are making it technically impossible. 2. Consumers don't like being tracked everywhere. 3. It never fully worked.

Instead of a 360-degree view and deterministic attribution, probabilistic audience modeling will now predominate. AI/ML will play a key role, and vendors will compete for supremacy in that space the same way multi-touch attribution was the hot thing in past years.

Eric Seufert has written instructively about the impact of this shift on startups, which will have to understand that, without quickly available deterministic data, improvements on marketing performance will be slower and harder to come by. More broadly, marketers (and CEOs/CFOs) need to understand that — really — not every marketing tactic can be measured in data on a dashboard.

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JASON FAIRCHILD
Co-Founder and CEO, TVScientific
@tv_scientific

Newton's Third Law states that for every action (force) in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction. Attribution establishes the causal relationship between an action and a reaction. In the world of performance advertising, we think of actions and reactions as ad exposures and outcomes.

TV attribution "science" has been in the Dark Ages since the 1950s, because marketers have not been able to establish a relationship between TV ads ("actions") and outcomes ("reactions"). As CTV has emerged, the industry still applies the flawed "last click attribution model" from search and social to TV (which is DOA because, among other reasons, you can't click on a TV). This is analogous to the Dark Age practice of treating a cold through bloodletting.

But a renaissance is underway, led by technologies/tools that deterministically measure TV ad exposure-to-outcomes, and quantify the discreet contribution of any marketing channel through advanced approaches like incrementality testing (and more). This evolution will finally help us apply Newton's Third law to advertising and attribution science.

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ADTECH WORD *prompt*

adotat

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Attribution in marketing is a specter that haunts the digital corridors with promises and pitfalls alike—a phantom stitched together by algorithms and assumptions. As we navigate this shadowy realm, six oracles of the industry offer their insights, sometimes biting, other times bemused, about the true nature of this elusive beast.

Judy Shapiro, CEO of engageSimply, casts a critical eye back to the predigital era, her words echoing like a ghost of marketing past. "Predigital, measuring marketing ROI [was] simple," she says, recalling a time when P&G's annual brand business reviews consisted of a mere "two-page review document with no attribution charts in sight." Yet, as digital advertising swelled, so did the complexity of attribution, unleashing what Shapiro calls "the great attribution wars," where models like first touch, last touch, and the enigmatic U and W series became weapons of choice, often "more confusing than insightful."

Paul Knegten, the Adtech CMO of legend, delves deeper into this apparition. "The challenge with attribution is not cookies," he suggests, dismissing the technical jargon. Instead, he turns to the human element, the "weird spongy organ" of the brain. He questions the very nature of consumer decisions with a provocative thought experiment: "Did I buy it because I searched for it, or did I search because I wanted to buy it?" This inquiry casts doubt on the linear narratives spun by attribution models, suggesting they may be mere illusions of causality.

Enter the Adtech God, deity of DSPs, who paints attribution as a puzzle with all pieces flipped down, a riddle wrapped in the enigma of cross-device behavior. "Dealing with cross-device tracking and data integration is no joke," they proclaim, likening the task to corralling a drunken ensemble of friends, each using a different chat app, to plan a trip. The metaphor is biting—what are we really tracking in marketing, and what is simply the misfiring of disconnected data points?

Pesach Lattin, Publisher at ADOTAT, casts a long shadow on the history of attribution, tracing its roots back to the early 1900s. Yet, he brings to light the fallacies that plague modern digital attribution, informed by the insights of Les Binet. "The fallacy of immediacy," "the fallacy of last-touch," and "the fallacy of first-touch" are but a few of the ghost stories told to marketers.

Binet's wisdom is a stark warning against the "smoke and mirrors" that often conceal the true effectiveness of advertising.

Dave Morgan, Founder of Simulmedia, doesn't mince words when he describes attribution as the "most important — and abused" element of digital advertising. He accuses the industry of peddling snake oil, selling an overhyped notion of attribution that's bolstered by "fancy dashboards" and "fancy talk" rather than tangible results. He presents a sobering perspective: if we were to believe the attribution reports, we'd be convinced that marketing spend outstrips the Gross Domestic Product of nations.

Joe Zappa from Sharp Pen Media declares the death of the 360-degree view of the customer, a concept that has become "technically impossible" and widely unpalatable to privacy-seeking consumers. The shift toward probabilistic audience modeling and AI/ML, he notes, is more a resignation to the limitations of data than a step forward.

Jason Fairchild, Co-Founder and CEO of TVScientific, sees a glimmer of hope, a potential renaissance in TV attribution akin to applying Newton's Third Law to advertising. Yet, one can't help but wonder, given the disillusionment voiced by his peers, whether this renaissance will materialize or remain as intangible as the concept of attribution itself.

In this chiaroscuro of insights, attribution emerges not as a concrete pillar of marketing but as a will-o'-the-wisp, leading marketers through a quagmire of data and technology.

The question looms large: Is attribution the solid ground of marketing strategy or merely a specter of our digital desires, a ghost in the machine of modern advertising?

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