

# THE VIEWABILITY BALANCING ACT


*Optimizing to What Matters Most*

dstillery





Three years ago, less than half of all digital ads were viewable. What started out as healthy self-regulation to address a critical issue has introduced unintended complexities, and may have swung the pendulum too far.

A top-down view of a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a watch on their left wrist. To the left of the laptop is a white cup of coffee. In the bottom left corner, there is a notebook and a pen. The entire image has a dark, monochromatic blue-green tint.

*The Viewability Balancing Act* captures new research into some of the unintended consequences of the viewability standard. This guide is designed to help marketers use that standard most productively to achieve a brand's true objectives while avoiding the pitfalls of an over-reliance on viewability.

# VIEWABILITY IS NOT A PERFORMANCE METRIC

Viewability is no guarantee that impressions are being delivered to their intended audiences or that they will achieve their desired impact. The Media Rating Council guidelines for viewable impressions were never intended as a performance metric. Brands and agencies demanding 100 percent viewable impressions or mandating campaign optimization toward viewability are misinterpreting the MRC guidance.

# OUR RESEARCH HAS UNCOVERED THREE KEY INSIGHTS ON VIEWABILITY

1

Viewability can undermine ROI goals

2

Fraud follows viewability

3

Context is compromised when  
viewability is the priority



# 1

## VIEWABILITY CAN UNDERMINE ROI GOALS

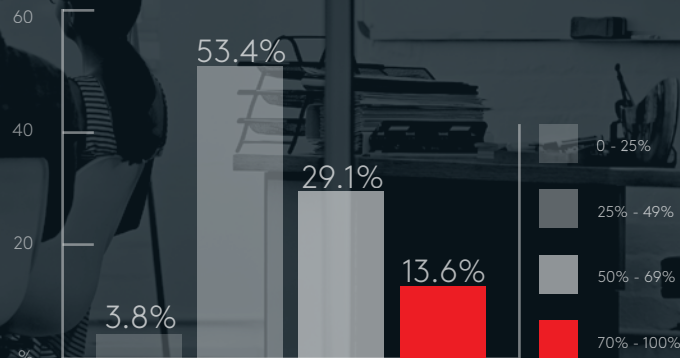
An over-emphasis on viewability is reminiscent of the industry's former over-reliance on click-through rate as a proxy for engagement. Just as clicks in isolation proved to be a misleading metric (having more to do with targeting clickers with click-inducing creative than targeting customer prospects with compelling brand messages), focusing on viewability in isolation can detract from overall campaign objectives.

Not only is there a scarcity of viewable impressions, those that fall below minimum viewability thresholds still hold value and can achieve marketers' objectives – including contributing to a lower overall cost-per-viewable-impression.

# VIEWABLE IMPRESSIONS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY

An analysis of 1.2 billion ad calls during a 24-hour period found that less than 15 percent of pre-bid inventory met the IAB's acceptable threshold of 70 percent viewability, and less than half were at least 50 percent viewable. This has forced advertisers to make difficult choices between viewability and performance by limiting the ability of targeting methodologies to reach scale.

BID VOLUMES BASED ON PRE-BID VIEWABILITY SCORE



Source: IAS pre-bid viewability scores, February 2016

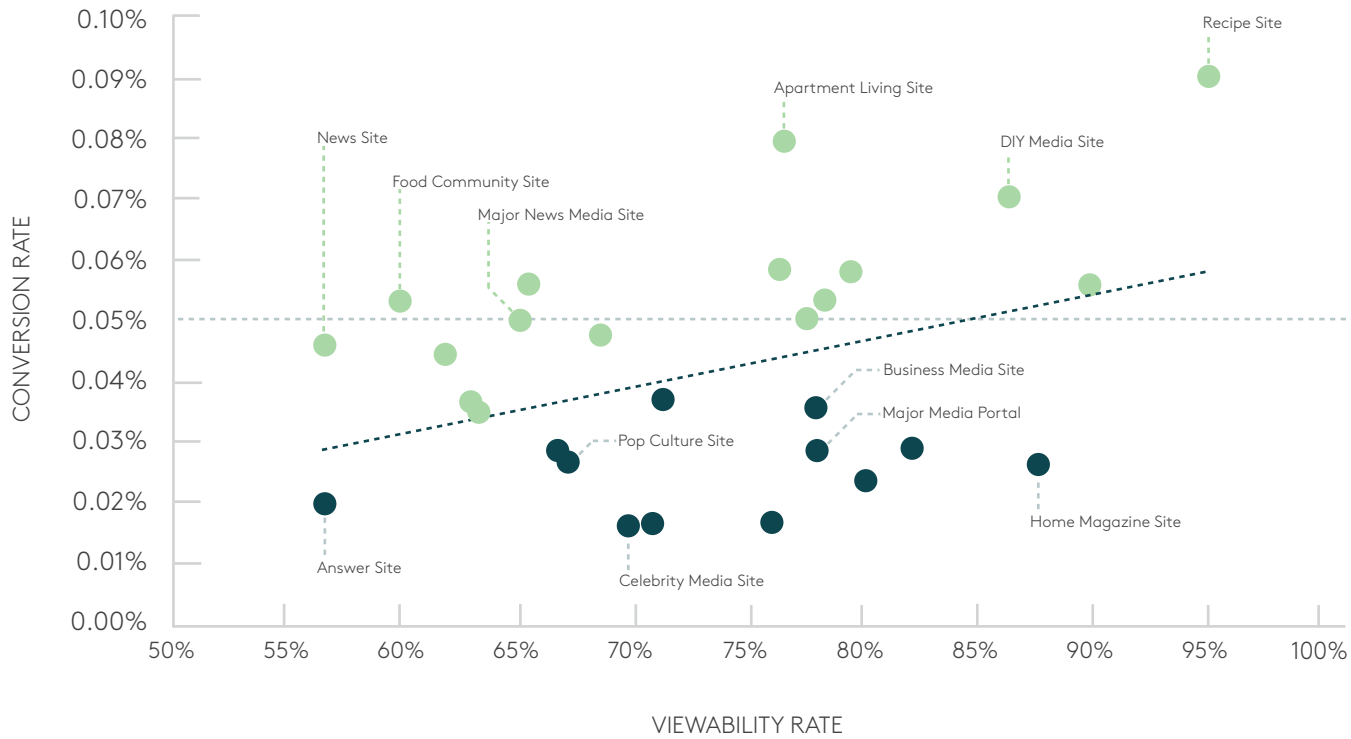


# NOT ALL IMPRESSIONS ARE CREATED EQUAL

Impressions that fall below 70 percent viewability can sometimes yield results that would otherwise be lost if campaigns adhered to a rigid viewability metric. In a campaign for a major home goods retailer, Dstillery found inventory with between 50 and 75 percent viewability met performance goals based on the content and audiences of those sites, in many cases outperforming higher viewability inventory.



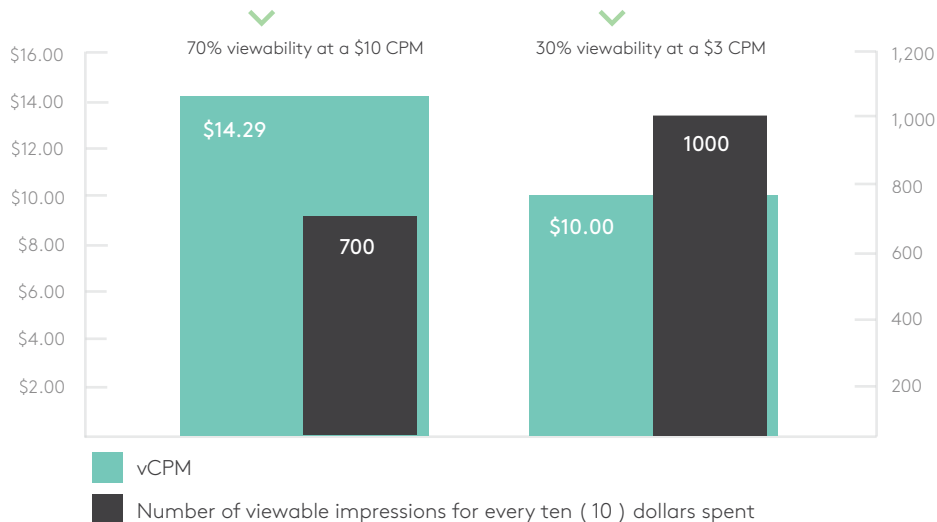




Spring 2016, IAS, Dstillery

# BLENDING LEVELS OF VIEWABILITY CAN ACHIEVE SUPERIOR RESULTS

Inventory with greater viewability is generally more expensive; sometimes buying lower viewability can achieve superior results on a more economical cost-per-viewable-impression basis.



## KEY INSIGHT VIEWABILITY AND ROI

Constraints on viewable inventory require establishing realistic goals for acceptable thresholds of viewability based on campaign objectives. A strategy that combines different levels of viewability will tend to achieve superior results on a cost-per-viewable-impression basis.

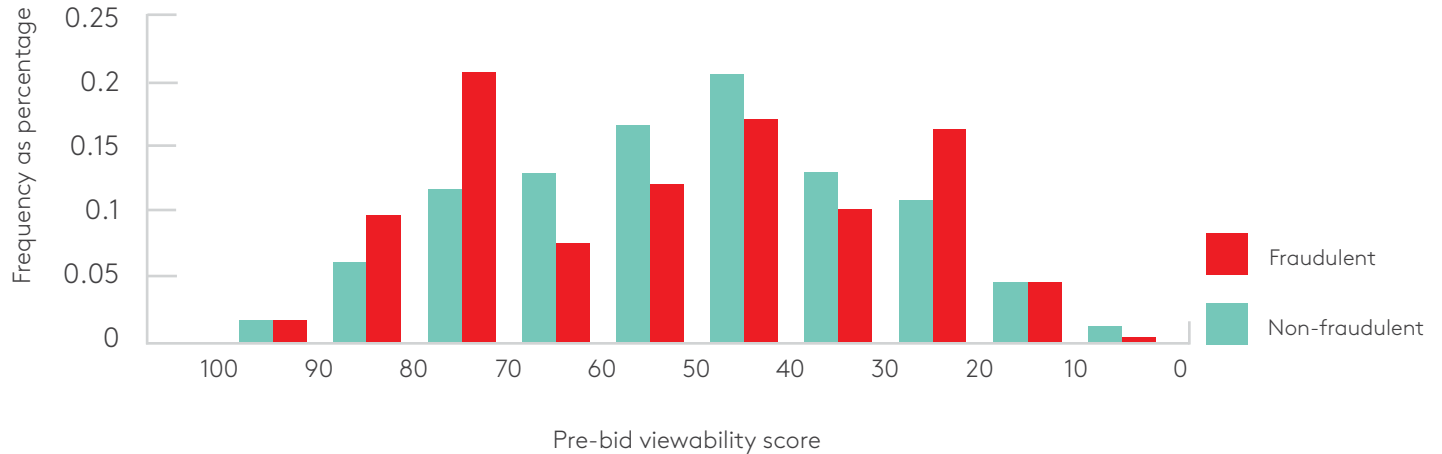


# 2

## FRAUD FOLLOWS VIEWABILITY

The most viewable impressions aren't necessarily fraud-free and in fact may be more prone to attracting bad actors due to generally high demand. Fraud tends to follow the money, and bots are programmed to fool viewability measures.

An analysis of the relationship between fraud and viewability concluded that impressions in the 70 to 90 percent viewable range were more susceptible to fraud.



## KEY INSIGHT VIEWABILITY AND FRAUD

Beware of introducing a heightened level of fraud due to a focus on viewability. Work with vendors who scrub for bots and fraud, so viewability is always measured on valid traffic. Furthermore, optimize to real business outcomes such as sales, downloads or time spent on site to ensure human interaction.

# 3

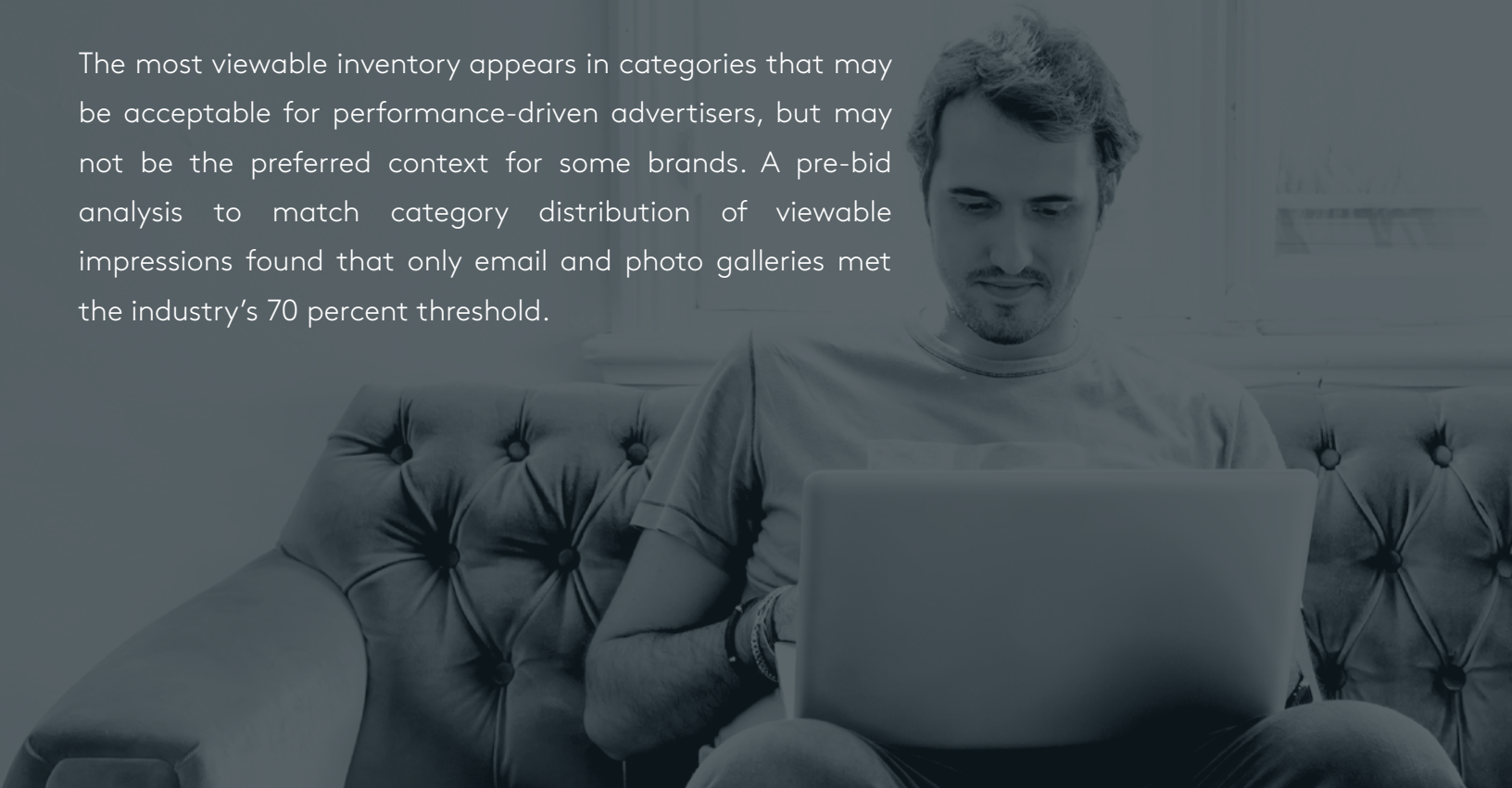
## CONTEXT IS COMPROMISED WHEN VIEWABILITY IS THE PRIORITY

Viewable inventory is mostly found in a few categories, which limits relevant placement options for some brands. The size and placement of creative on the page also impacts viewability, requiring thoughtful consideration to avoid a negative impact on campaign goals.



## MOST VIEWABLE INVENTORY IS FOUND IN A FEW CATEGORIES

The most viewable inventory appears in categories that may be acceptable for performance-driven advertisers, but may not be the preferred context for some brands. A pre-bid analysis to match category distribution of viewable impressions found that only email and photo galleries met the industry's 70 percent threshold.





**92%**

Mail

PRE-BID VIEWABILITY SCORES



VIEW %



**70%**

Photos



**63%**

Games



**60%**

Dating



**59%**

Social



**57%**

Radio



**55%**

Portal



**51%**

Access



**49%**

News



**45%**

Messaging



**41%**

eCommerce

Source: IAS pre-bid viewability scores, February 2016



## CREATIVE SIZE AND PLACEMENT IMPACTS VIEWABILITY

Smaller ads are more viewable because a larger portion of their pixels are in view. Google found that vertical units had higher viewability because they remain on the page longer. Optimizing toward smaller creative could discredit larger display options with the potential to drive higher awareness, but miss the technical standard for viewability because all of their pixels are not in view.

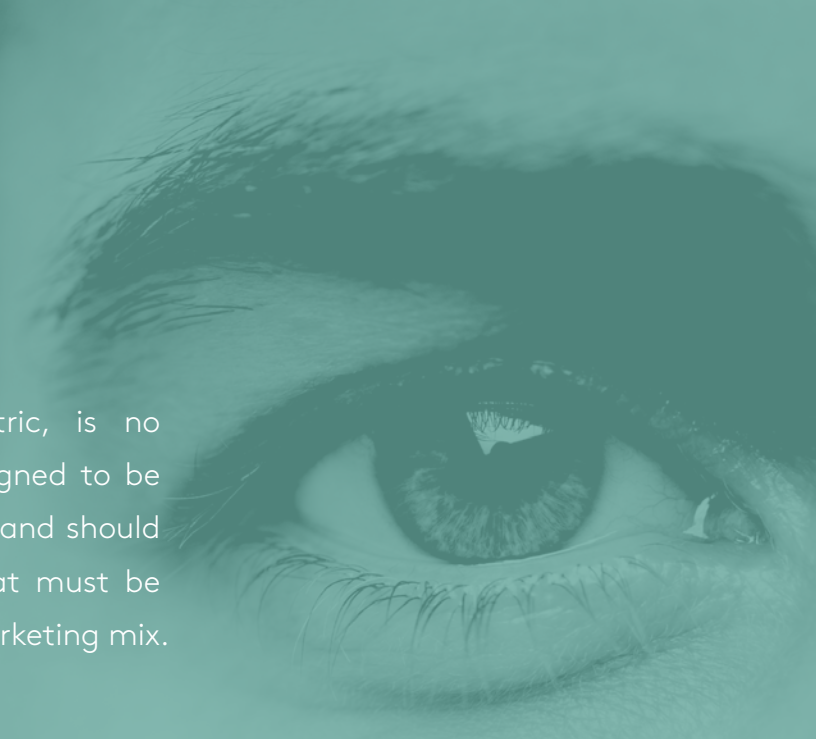


## KEY INSIGHT VIEWABILITY AND CONTEXT

Work with media and analytics partners to determine optimal delivery by category and the impact on performance. Regardless of their viewability, ads should be placed where there is less clutter on the page and where they are likely to have the most time in view.



Viewability, while an important technical metric, is no guarantee of campaign performance. It was designed to be only one element of media strategy and planning and should be used as such. Viewability carries tradeoffs that must be considered when determining the overall digital marketing mix.



## ABOUT DSTILLERY

Dstillery is a pioneer in big data intelligence. It uses a combination of proprietary technology and human intuition to help brands and media companies achieve their marketing objectives. The company distills massive data sets to identify patterns in consumer behavior and build custom audiences across multiple channels. Brands and media buyers activate these audiences using Dstillery's managed service or programmatic self-service platform. Dstillery is distinguished by its transparency and passion for good science, values held by its 175 employees across nine offices in the United States. Its 97 percent client retention rate is testament to the quality of both its performance and its service.



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