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MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

The Currency of Trust in Agency-Client Relationships

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What Paramount and Nielsen's Contract Dispute Means for the Future of Alternative Media Currencies

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The Currency of Trust in Agency-Client Relationships: A Foundation for Thriving in a Fragmented Media Landscape

By Marilyn Davis, EVP, Managing Partner

In recent years, the advertising industry has faced a surge in practices that undermine transparency, efficiency, and ultimately, trust. Complex programmatic systems, the rise of principal media and "Made for Advertising" sites have left clients paying for impressions that don't reach real audiences, wasting significant portions of their budgets. This "trust deficit" isn't just a philosophical issue—it has measurable financial consequences. Billions of ad dollars are siphoned off each year by intermediaries and low-quality inventory, leaving brands with less effective campaigns and underwhelming results.

The cost of this trust deficit extends beyond monetary losses. When clients don't fully understand where their ad dollars are going, they lose faith in their agency partners and grow reluctant to embrace innovation. The result is a vicious cycle: clients become skeptical of advertising's value, demand deeper scrutiny, and, in some cases, scale back investments that could otherwise drive business growth.

In today's fragmented media landscape, establishing trust isn't simply advantageous; it's essential. As Stephen Covey emphasizes, trust is the currency of all successful relationships. Agencies that put transparency and accountability at the forefront can mitigate these losses and provide clients with genuine value. By openly discussing fees, explaining ad spend allocation, and proactively identifying waste, agencies position themselves as protectors of their clients' investments—not merely media buyers, but strategic partners prioritizing results over hidden fees.

Trust accelerates performance, as Covey asserts, by increasing speed and reducing cost. An agency that can act as a trusted guardian of ad spend, prioritizing client success over revenue from hidden fees, creates a competitive advantage that transcends tactical expertise. Building back trust isn't just a way forward—it's a necessity for the industry to regain credibility and foster healthier, more impactful client relationships.

/UPDATES

What Paramount and Nielsen's Contract Dispute Means for the Future of Alternative Media Currencies

By Mark Brown, Executive Lead

A major battle in the media currency wars is underway between two heavyweights in the media world: Paramount and Nielsen Research. On one side we have Paramount, one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. Their portfolio includes some of the most iconic and highly-rated broadcast and cable networks including CBS, MTV, Comedy Central, BET, and Nickelodeon along with the streaming platforms Paramount+ and Pluto. On the other side is Nielsen, the default media research and currency provider for every media company and agency in the country. This fight between two legacy media companies may have lasting ramifications for the future of alternative media currencies for years to come. So, how did we get here?

As often is the case, it comes down to money. Paramount's contract with Nielsen expired on October 1. While both parties were negotiating a renewal, Paramount's primary concern was cost. John Halley, President of Paramount Advertising wrote in a memo to clients that "Nielsen's cost as a percentage of Paramount ad revenue have quintupled over significant parts of our business over the last years." Paramount claimed that the cost of Nielsen's services for some of their networks "already exceed the total advertising revenue of the network being measured." It doesn't take a genius to know that isn't a sustainable business model for Paramount.

For their part, Nielsen also sent a letter to their clients - including Rain the Growth Agency - warning that "despite our best efforts, Nielsen and Paramount have not been able to come to terms on a new agreement. Without a new deal in place...Paramount will no longer have access to Nielsen's products and services." At the beginning of the standoff, Nielsen expressed optimism that it would not last long and that they "...look forward to reaching a new deal with Paramount as they modernize their business."

At first, this felt like deja vu. In 2019, both companies had a similar impasse, but a new contract was signed quickly. This time, they are into their second month with no signs of resolution. What has changed in the last five years to make that possible?

The Rise of Alternative Currencies

The biggest change is that Nielsen's legacy status as the only game in town has been challenged by a group of competitors that are earning accreditation, certification, and acceptance from the advertising ecosystem. In 2019, Paramount turned to Comscore as their backup currency, but at the time it did not feel like a long-term solution. Now, Paramount is leaning into VideoAmp as their backup currency. VideoAmp received certification from the Joint Industry Committee earlier this year, but has not yet earned accreditation by the Media Ratings Council. They have measurement contracts with other major networks, like Warner Bros. Discovery, and agencies have expressed a greater willingness to transact on currencies other than Nielsen.

The fight escalated on November 11, as Nielsen sent another letter to its agency clients responding to Paramount's position and their selection of VideoAmp to replace Nielsen. In the letter, Nielsen CEO Karthik Rao stated that "Paramount is demanding a nearly 50% reduction in the price of our service. This not only undervalues our substantial investments, but makes it unsustainable to provide the support and quality that all Nielsen clients rely upon." He went on to take a shot at VideoAmp's product, saying "this substitute provider's data lacks the precision to deliver reliable, actionable insights, particularly for over-the-air broadcasting and live sports." While Rao claimed that "I remain hopeful that we will reach a deal with Paramount Global…" the letter's tone doesn't give the sense that they are any closer to a deal.

Impact on Advertisers

What does all this mean to advertisers? First, it is important to note that while Paramount is not currently a subscriber to Nielsen, Rain the Growth Agency still is. That means we still access and track performance using Nielsen ratings for all of our clients every day. Since Paramount no longer subscribes to Nielsen, they will be relying on VideoAmp impressions for post-analysis and audience guarantees, where applicable. This puts Rain the Growth Agency in the unique position of seeing a head-to-head comparison of the two measurement services to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. For our clients who do have audience guarantees on Paramount properties, our dedicated and experienced Integrated Media Investment team is there to ensure that every client receives the full value of what they purchased while Nielsen and Paramount work through this.

For everyone else, Paramount may represent the first step towards even greater adoption of alternative currencies in the media marketplace. Ending Nielsen's monopoly on media currency would be good for our industry - competition encourages innovation and keeps prices in check—but it is too soon to say if this is a short-term detour or a longer-term shift that will alter media measurement for good.

/NOTEPAD

Source: ZGF

Google Brandformance LA Recap

By David Gelt, Director, Paid Search & YouTube

In late October, Google hosted members of the Rain the Growth Agency team for Brandformance LA, an event about their tools and technology that can be leveraged to drive brand and performance outcomes.

Following introductions, Google's Chief Brand Marketing Evangelist, Aprajita Jain, led off the event discussing an issue facing numerous brands—a focus on short-term KPIs without proper investment or visibility into long-term outcomes. While short-term tactics can, and often do, lead to a spike in performance, over time that performance dwindles. Alternatively, brands that invest in long-term impact with their marketing see 60% sales growth over time, according to Analytic Partners. These campaigns aren't just successful in driving long-term revenue growth, however; they also drive incrementality. By leveraging brand-centric creative and focusing on long-term outcomes, brands can introduce new users to their products, leading to future revenue.

Of course, focusing on long-term outcomes is easier said than done. Jennifer Haran, Google's Director of YouTube & Commerce Product Strategy, spent her session focused on the importance of measuring long-term outcomes to make proper in-flight optimizations. While aligning targeting and creative strategy to the goals of any campaign are paramount, clearly defining success and understanding the impact across the full consumer journey need to remain front-of-mind as well.

Understanding Google's Impact on the Funnel

With a variety of Google tools and tactics, such as YouTube Select, Video for Reach or Demand Gen, the Rain the Growth Agency team is easily able to align a brand's campaign with their goals. Additionally, we consistently set up brand and search lift studies to understand full-funnel impact. These studies can be helpful as leading indicators in-flight to understanding how audience sentiment toward a brand or product is changing, how creative is resonating beyond metrics like view rate, and help show insights into what creative messages are most important when users are early in their purchase journey to ease the burden of driving conversions when they reach the bottom of the funnel.

Testing and strategic iteration are key to driving full-funnel strategy as well. By understanding leading metrics such as brand or search lift studies, as well as leveraging marketing mix modeling and incrementality studies, the Rain the Growth Agency team can strategize with more information, leading to stronger plans driving better results.

Creative's Role in Brand Growth

Of course, creative is a key piece in driving brand growth. Developing the volume of creative to drive both upper- and lower-funnel messages to a diverse audience can be time-consuming and expensive. However, Google has continued to invest in their generative AI creative tools, making this creative development more accessible. From simple tasks like resizing existing creative or cutting longform videos into shorter cuts for more versatility, to generating valuable creative variants leveraging AI translations to quickly develop ads for users that don't use English as their primary language, Google's AI is continuing to improve its creative capabilities, allowing brands to meet their various needs.

The overall message of the day was clear—it is vital that brands drive brand marketing alongside performance tactics to drive long-term business outcomes, but creative and measurement need to work together with media activation. With Rain the Growth Agency's expertise in all three of those areas as part of our full-service offerings, and the variety of tools Google has developed and continues to improve, it's time to make sure your brand is focused on long-term growth.

/NOTEPAD

The Race To The Bottom Is Over. Advertisers Care About Quality Again

By David Nyurenberg, Director of Video Product Development & Innovation

This op-ed was originally published in AdExchanger.

Digital advertising has long promised precision and efficiency. But our obsession with "following the audience" has allowed low-quality sites and vanity metrics to thrive while brand integrity suffers.

This singular focus on targeting audiences and measuring their impact through typically non-incremental attribution, rather than evaluating media quality, has steered us off course.

The digital landscape is now packed with dubious inventory, fraudulent media properties and non-organic content—all of which ultimately work against brand goals rather than serving them. And thanks to automation and AI, it's easier than ever to create junk sites.

Decades of advertising fundamentals tell us that context matters. Media planners once focused on content alignment, environment quality and publisher credibility, ensuring ads resonated in valuable settings.

But the drive for audience-first targeting over the last 15 years has abandoned these principles, in favor of hyper-targeted audiences accessible anywhere – irrespective of quality.

An Industry Ready for Change

In theory, an audience-centric strategy promised brands precision, delivering ads to the "right" people at the "right" time. And these impressions were validated through attribution models that claimed to connect outcomes to the ads served.

But in practice, we've enabled the rise of Made For Advertising (MFA) sites and venture-funded tech companies whose primary incentives do not align with those of their clients.

Ad tech platforms often promote MFA and other cheap placements to media buyers, who, encouraged by the low CPMs and vanity metrics, overlook the questionable environments. The result? A system that neglects the critical foundation of ad quality, and instead, encourages a race to the bottom.

More disturbingly, this audience-first obsession has created a generation of marketers trained to prioritize retargeting and hyper-targeted segments over fundamentals like reach, frequency and contextual relevance.

Media buying is ultimately about maximizing effective reach. As brands fragment into smaller

audience pools, they sacrifice that reach, driving up costs for access to smaller, increasingly competitive audiences.

And now, with cookie deprecation and signal loss underway, the audience-first approach is more tenuous than ever.

The primary beneficiaries of the audience-first model have not been advertisers or publishers but rather a few monopolistic tech companies. These companies, which encouraged the shift to audience-first, now seem to be under scrutiny every other week for placing ads on poor-quality sites. Still, they've pocketed massive profits while the responsibility for brand safety, transparency and ad effectiveness falls on the brands themselves.

Meanwhile, premium publishers struggle to survive. News publishers, once regarded as prime inventory, are blocked over "brand safety" fears, while brands settle for placement on obscure sites that artificially inflate impressions and serve little purpose.

But a cultural shift is underway. Walgreens' Senior Director of Media Strategy and Planning, James Lerner, recently spoke at a Mediaweek event challenging walled gardens, calling attention to inflated metrics and transparency issues. His words underscore the need for more marketers to hold these platforms accountable.

Hershey's VP of Media and Marketing Technology, Vinny Rinaldi, has also emerged as a change agent, urging marketers during his recent keynote at Programmatic IO to prioritize creative quality and the environments where ads are served over mere audience targeting.

And, during a panel about supply path optimization at a recent PubMatic event, Bayer's Head of Investment and Ad Tech, Gary Guarnaccia, called the audience to action, stating "Industry change depends on everyone's participation, but it's buyers who have the power to drive it. That's why it's crucial for buyers to understand the supply side thoroughly and actively support positive change in the market."

These voices highlight the need for quality-based approaches—supply path optimization, media curation and metrics that prioritize real engagement.

This new generation of marketers is identifying and investing in quality. They're using metrics like video sound-on measurement, which gauges user engagement by assessing whether viewers keep audio enabled. They're also doing real supply path optimization, which involves analyzing log files and taking a deeper look into the supply chain—not just reducing the number of SSPs they work with. And they're monitoring ad refresh rates, choosing placements with low or no refreshes to avoid paying for impressions that have minimal impact.

There's been an awakening. The most sophisticated, industry-leading brands are tackling these challenges head-on, while those who aren't risk being left behind.

A Turning Point

Digital advertising can either double down on this broken system, allowing intermediaries and poor-quality inventory to drain budgets, or it can prioritize transparency and quality. With AI automation on the rise, there's a critical need to avoid repeating the mistakes of audience-first targeting.

Marketers today need to become vocal advocates for a more accountable industry, following the lead of those brave enough to stand up and fight for the future of our industry at the expense of their own job security.

Tides are shifting, and it's on us to hold technology players accountable. We have to be the change we want to see. When the history books on this era of digital marketing are written, what side of history do you want to be on?

/NOTEPAD

Takeaways from Google Think Lead Gen 2024

By Stasia Fulginiti, Director, Paid Search & YouTube

Rain the Growth Agency team members were recently invited by Google to their New York office for Think Lead Gen, an event covering strategic insights for enhancing lead generation across both B2B and B2C landscapes. Here are the key takeaways:

1. Less is more: Focus on quality leads

Andres Mortensen, Managing Director of Google's Lead Gen Sales, emphasized the importance of quality over quantity in lead generation. Rather than filling pipelines with high volumes, businesses should focus on engaging high-quality leads, especially when consumers are actively "in-market." By the time a user is ready to fill out a form, they have typically narrowed down their choices to just two brands, which means brands must build resonance early to stay top of mind.

2. Timing and relevance drive conversions

Lead generation often involves complex, offline conversion processes. To succeed, companies must define and optimize for lead value, focusing on relevance over personalization. Research from Sneha Dontula, Insights Lead at Google, and Stefano Puntoni, Professor and Co-Director of AI Marketing, Wharton School, highlighted that relevance—offering quality, value, and benefits—resonates more with users than generic personalization efforts. Users, who increasingly feel empowered by research, are four times more likely to choose brands discovered during the purchase journey itself.

3. Use data to drive decision-making

Data-driven decisions can unlock substantial value in lead generation, but successful analysis starts with the right questions. Predictive models can help businesses estimate lead lifetime value (LTV), and when paired with AI-powered insights, companies can adjust targeting and bidding to maximize high-value lead acquisition. For instance, brands using offline conversion data and

integrating first-party data for bidding optimization saw a significant improvement in lead quality.

4. AI-powered content and brand visibility

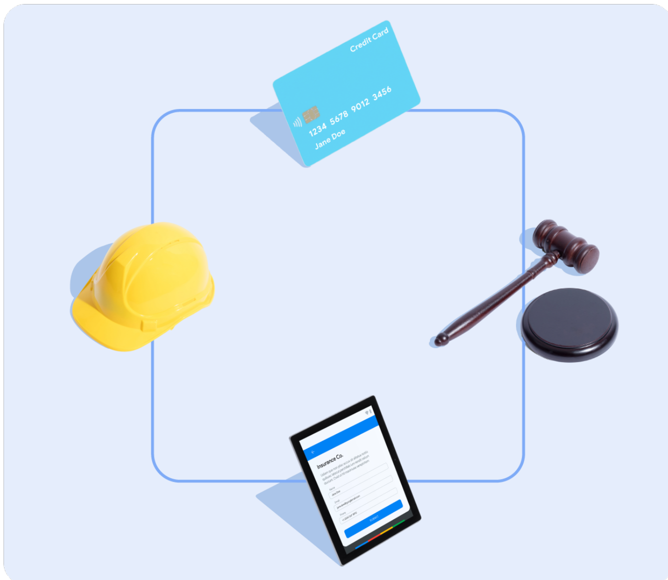
Tools like Google's Gemini and platforms such as YouTube are essential in lead generation, allowing for targeted, hyper-local content and real-time brand messaging. AI-driven insights are reshaping the approach to creative and media, enabling faster, data-backed decisions without replacing human intuition. Google placed significant emphasis on the time it takes to train AI, or in this instance, Gemini, to accelerate content delivery that embodies the brands' vision and message.

5. Embrace experimentation and imperfect data

The event encouraged brands to step beyond traditional approaches, testing broader targeting strategies and experimenting up the funnel. Performance Max and Demand Gen campaigns are effective when integrated with first-party data, supporting both demand generation and demand capture. Although imperfect data is sometimes necessary for faster insights, experimentation is crucial for identifying what will work in the future; even in your peak season.

Key Strategic Takeaways

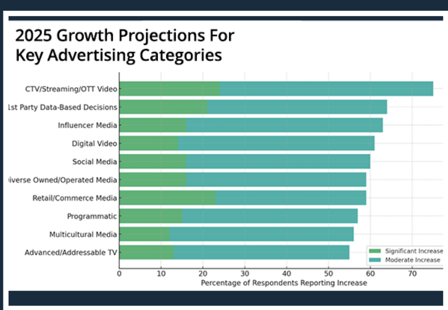
- Prioritize lead quality over quantity during key decision-making windows
- Embrace relevance over personalization to connect with informed consumers



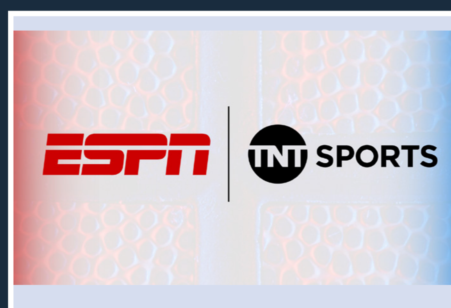
- Use AI and predictive LTV models to enhance lead value and improve return on ad spend (ROAS)
- Leverage first-party data to better optimize for lead quality, especially in offline conversions
- Experiment beyond traditional methods to stay aligned with changing consumer behavior

By aligning lead generation with these best practices, brands can effectively navigate the complexities of today's digital landscape and create lasting, valuable customer relationships.

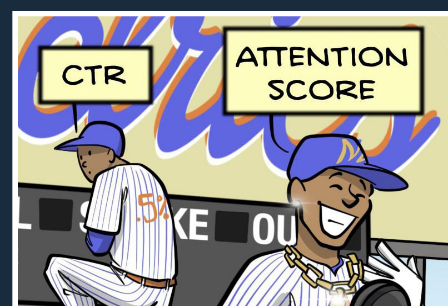
/QUICK HITS



MediaDailyNews: 2025 Ad Spend Forecast Puts CTV, Data First
[Mediapost]



ESPN and TNT Sports Reach Agreement for Iconic Inside the NBA
[ESPN Press Room U.S.]



Early Adopters Are Snapping Up Attention-Based Inventory Before Everyone Else Drives Up The Costs
[AdExchanger]

Need More Guidance?

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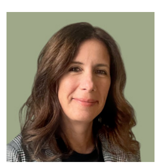

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