

Understanding MTA

A Marketer's Guide to Selecting the Right
Multi-Touch Attribution Technology Partner

September 2024



Marketers seek to understand the impact of everything — which means going beyond ‘last touch’ measurement

In the ever-evolving world of advertising, the quest to measure and optimize campaign performance is a constant pursuit. However, this pursuit is not without its share of challenges. Advertisers find themselves grappling with the complexity of achieving a holistic view of their efforts across numerous channels. The digital media landscape is marked by fragmentation, while walled gardens obscure valuable data. Traditional channels present their own set of challenges as quality data can be scarce, making attribution difficult. To overcome these obstacles, advertisers may be forced to use diverse tools to measure different aspects of their campaigns and piece together a complete picture of advertising effectiveness.

Last touch attribution, multi-touch attribution, and marketing mix modeling offer distinct approaches to measuring the impact of advertising efforts. The choice of which technique to employ hinges upon the specific needs and objectives of the business, as well as the available resources.

For advertisers seeking quick insights into the impact of individual touchpoints on conversions, last touch attribution is an easy-to-understand approach. This method attributes the entire credit for a conversion to the last touchpoint with which a customer interacted before converting. Due to privacy constraints leading to missing conversion data, many platforms have moved from reporting raw conversion metrics to modeled metrics, leading to trend disruption and magnified approach discrepancies across platforms.

The simplicity of last-touch attribution allows rapid assessment. However, it paints an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the customer journey.

The simplicity of last-touch attribution allows for rapid assessment of touchpoint effectiveness; however there are numerous drawbacks. Last-touch attribution disregards other influential touchpoints and non-media factors, painting an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the customer journey. The siloed nature of last touch attribution means that there are separate solutions for each media channel, making it complex to manage and difficult to compare across channels. Importantly, last-touch attribution often relies on third-party cookies, rendering it vulnerable as third-party cookies become increasingly less reliable and may disappear completely. While it may be the most cost-effective solution, its limitations hinder its long-term viability.



Multi-touch attribution unveils the entire customer journey

To gain a more holistic understanding of the customer journey, multi-touch attribution emerges as a compelling option. This technique considers multiple touchpoints that contribute to a conversion, enabling businesses to discern the role of each touchpoint and optimize their advertising strategies accordingly. By embracing multi-touch attribution, advertisers can uncover valuable insights into customer behavior and tailor their messaging to resonate at crucial stages of the journey. Nevertheless, implementing multi-touch attribution can be complex, requiring substantial investment of resources. It demands access to granular data and the application of sophisticated modeling techniques. Assigning accurate credit to each touchpoint presents a challenge, and various vendors employ different methodologies to achieve this goal. While multi-touch attribution offers a more comprehensive perspective, it necessitates careful consideration of its implementation and the resources available.

Marketing Mix Modeling goes wider to explore all factors

In the pursuit of a comprehensive overview of marketing impact, marketing mix modeling emerges as a statistical approach that takes into account all marketing activities, encompassing advertising, promotions, pricing, as well as external factors like seasonality and economic trends. This technique offers a panoramic view of the marketing landscape and its influence on business outcomes. By analyzing the combined effects of various marketing elements, advertisers can optimize their overall marketing mix and resource allocation. However, marketing mix modeling comes with its own challenges. It tends to be expensive and time-consuming to implement, requiring access to extensive datasets and sophisticated modeling techniques. Moreover, marketing mix modeling often lacks the granularity provided by other approaches, making it difficult to capture the individual touchpoints' specific impact on the customer journey.



Each approach adds value. **MTA sits in the ‘sweet spot.’**

Last Touch Attribution	MTA and/or TV Attribution	Marketing Mix Modeling
Less Costly	More Costly	
More Granular		Less Granular
More Frequent		Less Frequent
Relies on 3rd party cookies	Relies on panels, 1st party cookies or aggregate data	
Channels viewed in silos	Cross-channel measurement	
Does not control for non-media impacts	Controls for non-media impacts	
Insights applicable at current spend levels only		Incorporates response curves

Among these three options, MTA holds the potential to serve as a comprehensive tool to track and attribute advertising impact across an entire media plan, connecting the dots between various touchpoints, both online and offline, and revealing the true impact of advertising efforts. While the allure of MTA is undeniable, advertisers must carefully evaluate the available solutions to ensure they align with their specific measurement goals. Not all MTA solutions are created equal, and each comes with its own set of pros and cons.

Choosing the right multi-touch attribution vendor requires careful consideration of several crucial factors that align with advertisers' measurement objectives. Key criteria encompass coverage, attribution

methodology, granularity, dashboard features, speed of insights, and cost-effectiveness.

In the ever-expanding landscape of media measurement, one pivotal criterion stands out: Coverage.

The efficacy of an MTA solution hinges on the vendor's ability to seamlessly integrate data from diverse channels and platforms, spanning the realms of digital channels, offline channels, and emerging domains like connected TV and streaming audio.

And the extent to which an attribution vendor can capture and attribute ad exposures across these myriad media channels is intrinsically linked to the methodology employed in collecting ad exposure data.



But, you ask, what goes into any of these models? **Deterministic** and **probabilistic** approaches explained.

At the core of media attribution methodologies lies a spectrum, characterized by **deterministic** approaches on one end and **probabilistic** approaches on the other.

In simple terms, “*deterministic*” refers to data that is known to be true. Yes, A caused B.

A good example is when marketers measure a digital ad’s click-through rate: If a given ad made 1,000 impressions and 10 viewers clicked on the ad, you can *determine* the click-through rate was 1%.

On the other side, “*probabilistic*” is information based on relational patterns and likely outcomes. Hm, A likely caused B. An example here is you launch a new TV ad campaign and suddenly see a 30% spike in consumer Google searches for your specific brand name. You’re not certain, but it is highly *probable* that TV drove those incremental Google searches.

While deterministic analysis is more accurate, it tends to be limited to small portions or tactics of marketing campaigns. Probabilistic approaches, based on statistics, hold an advantage in that they can “scale” and make logic connections across much larger data sets—including, for example, exploring everything you are doing in marketing vs. all the outside competitive and environmental factors around you.

Deterministic approaches are focused on capturing data at the individual or household level, directly tying advertising exposures to conversions. In order for deterministic methods to function, there must be an identifier to match the data across sources. In the digital realm, this methodology utilizes first-party pixels and partnerships with publishers to track and identify users who have been exposed to ads online. When it comes to linear TV, the deterministic approach often involves enlisting a panel of Smart TV users equipped with devices or software that detects when an ad airs, attributing the exposure to the corresponding household within the panel.

Deterministic methodologies excel in capturing digital ad exposures and linear TV journeys. However, they encounter obstacles when it comes to tracking certain types of offline ad exposures and digital exposures nestled behind the protective walls of industry giants like Meta and Google. Traditional media forms such as print ads, radio spots, and out-of-home advertising pose obvious challenges for deterministic methods. The walled gardens curated by Meta and Google make it arduous, if not nearly impossible, to collect individual-level ad exposure data. Furthermore, Smart TV panels, while capturing linear TV activity, may introduce sample biases and limitations in terms of representativeness.



In contrast, probabilistic approaches embrace statistical modeling and aggregated data to estimate ad exposure probabilities.

These methodologies pave the way for broader coverage across media types, including offline channels, by leveraging a wide variety of available data sources and contextual information. While probabilistic approaches offer a more all-encompassing view, models inherently introduce a level of error and uncertainty, and can be limited in terms of granularity of insights. And probabilistic approaches often place an extra burden on the advertiser to provide regular access to data, such as weekly post logs.

While probabilistic approaches are more encompassing, they inherently introduce a level of uncertainty.

To enhance coverage and strengthen accuracy, combining deterministic and probabilistic approaches emerges as a powerful solution. Deterministic data, obtained from tracking digital ad exposures through pixels or panel data for linear TV, provides precise information about specific touchpoints. This robust data foundation serves as the basis for attribution modeling. Complementing deterministic data, probabilistic modeling bridges gaps where deterministic data may be lacking, capturing exposure to non-clickable media and in the process expanding coverage. By strategically leveraging the strengths of both approaches, marketers can achieve a broader scope of coverage.

When selecting an attribution vendor, it is crucial for advertisers to consider the media types they want to measure and the coverage they require. Deterministic approaches may be most suitable for digital and linear TV-focused campaigns, while combination deterministic and probabilistic approaches may offer a more holistic view that encompasses a broader range of media channels.

Another consideration is how to overcome “Walled Gardens.” Facebook and Instagram, Google and YouTube, TikTok and many of the other popular communication platforms in our modern era simply don’t speak well to each other.

A Walled Garden is a closed ecosystem controlled by a digital company, which makes it difficult for advertisers to obtain comprehensive information about attribution and campaign effectiveness outside of the platform. To overcome this challenge, MTA vendors use various strategies such as probabilistic modeling using aggregated data, data clean rooms to perform analysis without directly accessing raw user data, or test/control experimentation to determine incremental lift. By utilizing these tactics, some attribution vendors can measure walled garden attribution and provide valuable insights to advertisers while adhering to the platform's constraints.



Measuring conversions: Factors to consider

A conversion is an action taken by a prospective customer in response to an advertising campaign or marketing initiative. Conversions encompass various actions such as online or in-person purchases, lead form submissions, calls to customer service, newsletter sign-ups, or app downloads. Online conversions occur in the digital realm and can be tracked through first-party pixels on a company's website. Call center conversions, on the other hand, involve interactions with customer service representatives, necessitating specialized call tracking technology or CRM integration for attributing conversions to advertising efforts. Brick and mortar conversions occur at physical store locations and require strategies like POS data integration, location-based tracking, or the use of technologies like beacons or QR codes to attribute conversions to specific marketing campaigns. Since conversions can differ based on the nature of the business and ad campaign objectives, it is crucial to assess whether an MTA vendor can accommodate the desired conversion types for attribution in ad campaigns. Additionally, clients often face the challenge of needing to improve their internal systems, such as call tracking, Customer Data Platforms (CDPs), and web portals, to enable effective conversion tracking across various touchpoints. This improvement of internal infrastructure is often a necessary step to fully leverage the capabilities of MTA and ensure accurate attribution of conversions to marketing efforts. MTA vendors employ diverse attribution methodologies to assign credit to each ad exposure throughout the consumer journey.

As discussed earlier, last-touch attribution attributes all the credit for a conversion to the final touchpoint before conversion. Likewise, first-touch attribution assigns all the credit for a conversion to the initial touchpoint. Even-touch attribution divides and equally distributes the credit for a conversion across all touchpoints, while any-touch attribution assigns the full credit for a conversion to all touchpoints along the customer journey. Each of these approaches make assumptions about the influence of ad exposures, regardless of media type, position or timing. Methods that do not distinguish the differential impacts of ad exposure along the customer journey are relatively simplistic, incomplete and inherently inaccurate.

Data-driven approaches offer a more sophisticated attribution technique that considers the specific characteristics and performance of each individual touchpoint on the customer journey. Data-driven attribution is a blanket term for a variety of methods that use behavioral data to assign differential credit to individual touchpoints. These techniques include Bayesian models, A/B testing, machine learning, game theory and other statistical models or algorithmic techniques. While the most "accurate" technique is subjective, data-driven attribution represents a significant advancement over traditional, simplistic methods, offering advertisers more precise insights into the true drivers of conversion.

Choosing the appropriate attribution technique depends on the specific insights sought by the advertiser. Many data-driven attribution vendors also provide traditional attribution, such as last touch, allowing for customization of the analysis to address the advertiser's specific questions.



SELECTING AN MTA PARTNER

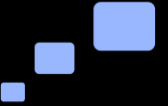
Criteria: Granularity

By carefully considering the granularity of reporting capabilities, advertisers can ensure they have access to the necessary level of detail to effectively optimize their marketing strategies. This allows them to delve deeper into campaign performance and make data-driven decisions that align with their unique business objectives and target markets.

Granularity in reporting refers to the ability to analyze and report on various dimensions of an advertising campaign, including individual touchpoints, creative variations, media placement characteristics, customer segments, and geographical markets.

For advertisers with smaller budgets or regional businesses, reporting granularity is crucial. They typically require insights tailored to their specific target audience and/or geographic market. In such cases, vendors with robust panels and broad representation may offer the best fit as they can provide detailed reporting and insights that align with the advertiser's narrower focus.

It's important to acknowledge that MTA vendors may have minimum spending or conversion thresholds to provide detailed reporting, taking into account considerations of statistical significance. Advertisers should verify if any such requirements exist and ensure they can meet them to access the desired level of granularity.



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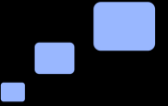
Criteria: Dashboard

While a feature-rich reporting dashboard is often expected from MTA vendors, the reality can vary. Some vendors provide minimal functionality, relying on users to export data for deeper analysis in their own environments.

When assessing MTA dashboards, advertisers should consider design, usability, customization options, and unique features like optimization capabilities. Personal preference plays a significant role, but functionality depth can be a key differentiator.

Advertisers face a choice: use vendor dashboards for quick, out-of-the-box solutions, or leverage their own environment for greater control and customization. The latter offers more flexibility but may require additional resources and expertise.

Ultimately, the chosen solution should meet the advertiser's needs and integrate seamlessly with existing systems. By evaluating these factors, advertisers can select an MTA vendor whose dashboard or data export capabilities best support their marketing analytics and decision-making processes.



SELECTING AN MTA PARTNER

Criteria: Speed to Insights

The speed at which an attribution vendor delivers insights is a critical consideration for advertisers. It encompasses two key aspects: the promptness of project set-up and the ongoing generation of attribution results for analysis. The duration of project set-up can vary from days to months, depending on the complexity of data collection requirements. Similarly, the time taken to generate and provide attribution results can range from hours to weeks.

Real-time or near real-time insights hold immense value as they empower advertisers to make agile and well-informed decisions regarding their campaigns. Vendors relying on client-provided data inputs, which often involve delays of days or weeks, inherently face slower processing times. Conversely, vendors that establish seamless data integration partnerships can automate the data collection process without client involvement, resulting in expedited delivery of insights. Ultimately, the speed at which attribution results are generated and made accessible significantly impacts advertisers' ability to leverage timely insights for optimal decision-making.

Criteria: Cost

Cost is a crucial factor for advertisers when choosing an MTA vendor. It requires a careful examination of the vendor's pricing structure and its alignment with the advertising spend, desired coverage, and required level of service.

Vendors offer different pricing models, such as subscription-based, tiered pricing based on usage, or ad hoc pricing based on an advertiser's specific requirements. Advertisers should analyze how the vendor's pricing fits their advertising budget. For instance, if the vendor charges a percentage of media spend, it is essential to assess the scalability of costs as advertising budgets fluctuate.

The extent of coverage provided by the attribution vendor should also be considered. If the vendor offers attribution across multiple channels, devices, and touchpoints, the cost may be higher due to the complexity and breadth of data and analysis involved. For advertisers focusing solely on online media, an expensive omni-channel approach may not be necessary or cost-effective.

The level of service offered by attribution vendors varies, ranging from "white glove" to software-as-a-service (SaaS), and it can significantly impact the cost. "White glove" service involves a high-touch, personalized approach with dedicated account managers or teams providing hands-on support, custom configuration, and tailored analysis, usually at a higher cost. On the other hand, SaaS is a self-service model where the vendor provides the software platform, and the advertiser manages most aspects independently, typically with limited or basic support at a lower cost. The level of support required depends on the available resources and expertise within the advertiser's organization.

Ultimately, finding the right balance between cost and value is key to maximizing ROI from advertising investments.



SCORING MTA VENDORS

Mediassociates has conducted an exhaustive study of MTA vendor capabilities, including variables below, onboarding times and costs. If you'd like help understanding detailed MTA solutions, contact us at information@mediassociates.com.

		Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C	Vendor D	Vendor E	Vendor F	Vendor G	Vendor H	Vendor I	Vendor J	Vendor K	Vendor L
COVERAGE	LINEAR TV	GOOD	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD		GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
	OTT/CTV	GOOD	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
	ONLINE VIDEO	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
	YOUTUBE		GOOD	GOOD	GOOD		AVAILABLE			GOOD		GOOD	GOOD
	SOCIAL		AVAILABLE	GOOD			AVAILABLE	GOOD	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
	OTHER DIGITAL	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD			AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD	AVAILABLE
	OFFLINE MEDIA	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD				AVAILABLE		AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	
	OFFLINE CONVERSIONS	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD		GOOD	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE		GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
REGIONAL GRANULARITY		GOOD		GOOD		GOOD	GOOD	GOOD			GOOD	GOOD	AVAILABLE
REFRESH SPEED		GOOD	AVAILABLE	AVAILABLE	GOOD	AVAILABLE	GOOD	AVAILABLE	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD	AVAILABLE	GOOD

AVAILABLE
 GOOD
 BEST IN CLASS





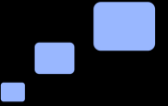
What's next?

Multi-touch attribution methods attempt to extract the most valuable and actionable insights while minimizing the number of measurement tools required. Despite ongoing advancements in coverage, accuracy, insights, and technology by MTA vendors, achieving a holistic understanding still often necessitates the use of multiple analytical techniques.

One such additional technique is Marketing Mix Modeling, which provides unique insights that MTA alone cannot deliver, including optimal spending levels and the impact of business drivers such as pricing, promotion and external influences.

Companies like Nielsen and Kantar have opted for a Unified MMM approach, aiming to combine the strengths of both MTA and MMM. Similar to how MTA vendors are incorporating a blend of deterministic and probabilistic methods, Unified MMM providers integrate elements of MTA and MMM. Rather than a replacement of MTA, we think Unified MMM is an example of the industry's journey, striving to leverage the finest data and methodologies available to offer advertisers comprehensive insights despite data access constraints.

The establishment of a definitive industry gold standard, whether it be Unified MMM or another methodology, remains uncertain. However, one thing is clear: the persistent presence of media fragmentation, privacy concerns, walled gardens, and other unforeseen obstacles will continue to challenge MTA vendors and advertisers alike. Vendors who maintain an open mindset towards exploring novel techniques and technologies and possess the agility to swiftly and cost-effectively implement them will emerge successfully from any upcoming measurement challenges. By staying adaptable and proactive, these vendors will be better equipped to navigate the evolving landscape and effectively measure their advertising efforts in the face of unforeseen crises.



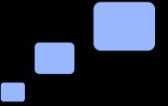
CONCLUSION

No one size fits all, but many are strong

In the selection of an appropriate multi-touch attribution vendor for your business, a careful evaluation of various factors is essential. It is crucial to recognize that there is no universal winner or one-size-fits-all approach. However, the encouraging news is that a multitude of viable options are available.

MTA vendors have consistently impressed us with their diverse range of techniques employed to tackle measurement challenges, and we have confidence that they will continue to evolve and adapt to address future obstacles. The dynamic nature of the industry ensures that MTA vendors will stay at the forefront of innovation, providing solutions that cater to new and unforeseen measurement challenges that may arise.

By remaining attentive and responsive to the evolving landscape, businesses can select the most suitable MTA vendor and harness the power of comprehensive measurement to optimize their advertising strategies and drive success.



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ABOUT MEDIASSOCIATES

Mediassociates is a media planning, media buying and analytics agency that focuses on Precision Branding — connecting data and high-impact media to help marketers predict and control advertising outcomes.

For information on our advertising media services, visit www.mediassociates.com.