Adlook

From Impressions to Impact

Measuring the business impact of programmatic: the media, brand and business ladder

How Adlook makes the open internet addressable and accountable. An outcome-led measurement framework that starts with the right audience, climbs from media quality to brand change to verified commercial growth, and feeds the business goal back into the platform as the thing it optimises toward.

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Contents

Executive summary

Media efficiency on its own stopped being enough some time ago. Advertisers today are judged on real results: revenue, customers, market share. Cheap impressions and tidy vanity metrics do not survive that conversation, and the conversation has moved up the building. Marketing now answers to the CFO far more often than it once did, and finance wants a credible line from what is spent on media to what the business gets back.

Most of the frustration we hear from clients comes down to one specific failure. We call it the **Translation Break**. Media is measured in its own dialect - CPMs, CTRs, viewability - and that dialect is never translated into the language the business runs on. Board conversations are about sales, distribution, share and brand equity, not viewability. When the numbers never make that trip, media ends up looking like a cost to cut rather than a lever to pull.

This paper sets out how we close that gap. The idea is deliberately simple, and the order matters: a strong **media** foundation drives brand metrics, and **brand** metrics drive **business** outcomes. We treat that as a ladder to climb rather than a menu to pick from. Every rung is more useful for decisions than the one below it, and every rung is built on the one below it. Skip a step and the numbers above it measure noise.

Underneath the whole ladder sits something more basic still: who is reached. The most rigorous measurement cannot rescue a campaign pointed at the wrong people. Audience quality is the input that decides whether attention, brand lift and sales are even available to be measured, which is why this paper treats targeting precision as the foundation under the foundation, not a setting chosen at the end.

There is also an operational reason the order pays off. AI lets us measure faster now, close to real time, so we can steer toward outcomes while a campaign is still live rather than reconstruct them afterwards. And when the business goal itself is the objective the platform optimises toward, rather than a stand-in for it, the system learns faster. A weak proxy produces weak optimisation. This is also how the open internet stays competitive against the walled gardens: by proving it caused something, not just that it appeared.

The rest of the paper walks the ladder in order, from the audience that makes it possible, up through media and brand to the business outcome itself, with the proof from real campaigns told along the way rather than stacked at the end.

Why the shift to business outcomes

Programmatic spent most of its life selling on scale and price. That era is ending, and several forces are doing the pushing.

The first is financial pressure. CPMs, CTRs and viewability do not pay the bills; revenue, leads, subscriptions and lifetime value do. Programmatic is now a core buying method across every screen, and once something is core, finance asks it to prove commercial impact rather than media activity. Most of the serious industry commentary through 2026 says the same thing in different words: marketing is expected to behave like a revenue function, and the value conversation increasingly happens in front of the CFO, in the CFO's vocabulary, which means mix modelling, experiments and incrementality rather than impressions.

The second is that the proxies have been found out. A high click-through rate is not a sale, and a cheap CPM is not valuable reach. Many brands learned this the expensive way, optimising toward surface metrics and ending up with junk traffic, clickbait placements and no downstream lift. The underlying issue is the Translation Break again: those metrics were never converted into business terms, so the media stayed disconnected from the thing it was meant to move.

The third is technical. Modern bidding systems are only as good as the objective they are given. An algorithm handed a real business outcome to chase - a conversion, a value, a sale - learns faster and better than one handed a vanity metric, at any point in the funnel. The quality of the optimisation cannot exceed the quality of the goal it is given.

The fourth is competitive. Search, social and retail media already pitch themselves on outcomes. For the open internet to stay on the plan, it has to do the same: prove incrementality, show it does something the closed platforms cannot, and connect exposure to commercial impact. That competitive stake sits underneath everything that follows.

The fifth is that the old brand-versus-performance split is dissolving. Brand teams now care about incremental reach, long-term revenue and acquisition cost; performance teams care about whether the brand work made their job cheaper. A framework that runs media into brand into business serves both at once, which a menu of disconnected products cannot.

The framework: one ordered climb

Our measurement work is built as layers that feed each other. A strong media foundation is what makes brand metrics move, and brand movement is what makes business outcomes possible. We introduce the rungs in that order, and we do not put a business result on the table before the media and brand foundations under it are real. The picture this paper aims to leave is a ladder to climb, not a shelf of options.

AI makes measurement faster, toward real time — and the business outcome is fed to the platform as the objective it optimises toward.

Decision-usefulness · each rung builds on the one below

STAGE 3
Business outcomes
Objective: connect media to commercial results
Metrics: sales, share, footfall, conversions, ROAS where relevant
Measured with: control-vs-exposed sales, footfall panels, exposure into client MMM

STAGE 2
Brand outcomes
Objective: prove exposure shifted perception
Metrics: ad recall, awareness, favourability, association, consideration
Measured with: test-vs-control brand lift + brand-equity tracking

STAGE 1
Media outcomes
Objective: secure quality, attentive, incremental contacts
Metrics: viewability, VCR, attention seconds, IVT, deduplicated reach
Measured with: attention scoring + delivery verification + cross-device dedup

Figure 1. The ladder. Each rung sits on the one below and becomes more useful for decisions as you climb. Audience quality is the foundation under all three.

Three rules govern the climb. Order is non-negotiable: media is the prerequisite for brand, brand for business, and nothing stands on its own. Usefulness rises as you go: media outcomes can be read in-flight, brand outcomes prove a shift in perception, and business outcomes are the only number that aligns the advertiser, the platform and the buyer at the same time. And AI is what carries the argument upward, because faster measurement is what lets us optimise toward the outcome live rather than reconstruct it later.

The engine underneath all of this. Adlook is an independent Brand Growth Platform for the open internet. Instead of a menu of separate tools, we run one proprietary intelligence system - a deep-learning engine that spans targeting, bidding, optimisation, creative and measurement, and can be aimed at a business goal from the first impression. The engine that protects media quality at the bottom of the ladder is the one optimising toward the business outcome at the top. That continuity is the point: the climb is one motion rather than a series of hand-offs between point solutions.

BEFORE THE CLIMB · THE FOUNDATION UNDER THE FOUNDATION

Audience quality

Before the ladder there is a question every rung depends on: are we reaching the right people at all? A flawless attention score on the wrong audience still produces nothing a business can use. The real starting point is targeting, and it is where a lot of open-web measurement quietly goes wrong, because the audience was loose to begin with.

In a world, where online identity is fragmented the old answer - buy a third-party segment built on cookies - is fading, and the segments that remain are often probabilistic, inferred on simplistic keyword matching rather than observed though a real understanding of browsed content. **Adlook's audience technology** takes a different route. It builds audiences from real, cookieless signals: the content people are actively reading, what they are actively searching for, and declared interests they have shared, all interpreted in real time by a generative-AI model rather than guessed from a static cookie pool. Advertisers can draw on more than 180 ready-made audience segments, or build a custom one by describing it in a prompt: the intent to capture, the competitor brands and products to consider, the nuances of the category. From that description the technology assembles and continuously refreshes a precise list of the pages high-intent users are actually visiting, and that becomes the signal the platform bids on. It works across the open internet, with the core audiences extended to connected TV and audio.

This is not a philosophical preference. In a controlled study comparing these AI-built audiences against the probabilistic third-party segments sold across most DSPs, the AI-built audiences matched or exceeded the third-party segments on accuracy, at lower cost and far greater scale. Better precision, more reach and less waste is the combination the rest of the ladder needs to be possible at all.

This thread runs through every campaign in this paper. The quality of the audience is what made the attention, the lift and the sales achievable in each one. The right audience makes the climb available; the wrong one cannot be repaired by measurement further up.

STAGE ONE OF THREE · THE FOUNDATION

Stage one: media outcomes

With the right audience identified, the first rung is reaching them in a quality environment with attention actually paid. Media outcomes are where the ladder formally starts, because everything above them inherits whatever quality, or lack of it, happens here.

The objective at this stage is to secure high-quality contacts and confirm the delivery was clean. We look at viewability, video completion rate, reach, invalid-traffic share, attention seconds and deduplicated reach. The promise is narrow and specific: prove that the audience was real, unique and incremental, and measure how much genuine attention it paid. Get this wrong - wasted impressions, the same household counted five times, ads no one looked at - and every brand and business metric stacked on top is built on sand.

The way we measure it starts with attention rather than viewability. Working with attention specialists such as Adelaide and Lumen, we score the inventory most likely to be genuinely seen, and the engine optimises pre-bid toward it rather than toward inventory that merely passes a viewability check. Delivery integrity is held with pre- and post-bid verification, invalid-traffic filtering and supply-path optimisation, so the contacts we report are contacts that actually happened. For reach, we resolve cross-device fragmentation to separate net-new audiences from people already reached, capping frequency at the household level and moving budget away from saturated homes toward fresh ones. That deduplication is not cosmetic: it is the difference between reach that is genuinely incremental and reach that is the same household counted again, and it is the mechanism behind the connected-TV campaign later in this paper.

A Mars campaign for Snickers shows what the foundation looks like when it holds. Reaching its audience through Adlook's content-based targeting across premium web, in-app and in-game placements, the campaign held a **72% video completion rate** with 24 seconds of in-view time, 85% viewability and an 85.9% on-screen rate, all above benchmark. National Express, working through the agency mSix, makes the same point through attention: optimising toward attention rather than cheap impressions lifted **attention scores by 84%**, a quarter above benchmark, and drove three times the site visits of comparable platforms. Neither is a business result yet. They are evidence that the raw material is sound - attentive, incremental, real contacts - which is what brand change is made of. Recall cannot be lifted among people who never saw the ad. Stage one earns the right to measure stage two.

STAGE TWO OF THREE · THE NEXT RUNG UP

Stage two: brand outcomes

Once the contacts are real, the question becomes whether the exposure moved anything. Brand outcomes sit above media because they depend on it, and below business because a shift in perception is the bridge to commercial behaviour, not the behaviour itself. The objective here is to show that exposure drove a real change in how people think about the brand: ad recall, awareness, favourability, message association and, where a campaign has a genuine call to action, purchase intent. Because most of this work is upper-funnel, we lead with recall, awareness and association and treat lower-funnel intent as the exception rather than the default.

The way we prove it is a test-versus-control study. One group is exposed to the campaign and a matched control group is held out and kept clear of all the advertiser's activity, so the difference between them is attributable to the campaign rather than to chance or to people who would have come round anyway. When a client wants to compare creatives or audiences, we run several exposed cells side by side as an A/B test, and each cell gathers a predefined number of survey responses before any result is reported, so the read is statistically meaningful rather than anecdotal. Because the study runs live inside the platform, answers come back within roughly two days of exposure, which keeps the signal clean and produces an actionable read faster, and at lower cost, than most external panels. And because the lift read is fast and sits inside the platform rather than in an external panel, it does not just sit in a report: the brand signal feeds back into optimisation, so the engine can steer toward the audiences, placements and creatives that are actually moving perception while the campaign is still live. For longer, strategic engagements we add brand-equity tracking, which compares brand growth across three realities at once - the open internet as a whole, the campaign's own control, and the actually-exposed group - answering the two questions clients really ask: is the targeting beating run-of-network, and did exposure genuinely shift awareness or consideration. When a client prefers an external currency, we run the study through the major panels, such as Kantar or Comscore, and we can line measured attention up against measured lift so the stage-one foundation connects directly to the stage-two result: more attention, more lift.

Nissan is a clean illustration of the whole rung. Working with OMD France, we reached in-market car buyers through Adlook's audience technology, kept the activation in premium brand-safe placements at 77% viewability, and quantified the perception shift with two brand lift studies rather than a single read. The unaided favourability lift came in at **26.9%**, with aided favourability up 13.4%.

"The Nissan Juke Hybrid campaign effectively combined precise content-based targeting helping us reach highly valuable users with strong intent, dynamic creatives to stand out from the crowd, and real-time optimization to deliver high-quality reach and strong brand engagement across the French market."

- **Béni Bamba-Mokamo**, Digital Media Specialist, Nissan France

Nissan's agency partner put the same result in the language of execution discipline.

"This Juke campaign is a strong example of how a clean, insight-driven setup, combined with tight collaboration between OMD, Nissan, and Adlook can deliver above-benchmark results without overcomplicating the execution."

- **Inês Lourenço da Graça**, Digital Trader Team Leader, OMD France

Helly Hansen makes the audience-quality point from the other direction. Ahead of ski season, Wavemaker and Adlook reached trip-planners and winter-sports audiences with a privacy-first, cookieless setup, prioritised high-attention environments, and measured the result with a brand lift study built around product consideration. Consideration rose **24%** overall, and the detail worth noticing is the dose response: among people who saw the campaign three or more times, the consideration lift was far higher still, evidence that quality reach and frequency compound rather than just accumulate. Other campaigns on the same rung tell consistent stories, from a 61% ad-recall lift for Royal Canin in a demanding, high-income pet-owner audience to a recall lift above 35% for Stellantis in Brazil.

"Our objective for Helly Hansen's Ski Collection was to drive strong engagement in a highly relevant and efficient manner. The layered activation strategy, combining advanced targeting with attention optimisation, proved key to exceeding expectations. The results clearly show that prioritising media quality translates into meaningful brand impact and business outcomes."

- **Amy Edwards**, Account Director, Wavemaker Global

Working with Mattel on its open-web programme, we lifted ad recall 42.4%, cut cost per acquisition around 20%, and got 70% of budget into working media against a market average of 44%, with the supply chain consolidated to 384 domains. The ANA's independent Fiducia study verified the efficiency numbers. We name this one because Mattel published it; the anonymised connected-TV case later in the paper is a different campaign under a different agreement.

> *"At Mattel, we are constantly evolving our digital strategy to not only drive performance but also ensure we're investing responsibly in the open internet. Partnering with Adlook has been a key milestone in that journey. Their full-funnel platform enabled us to reach our audiences more effectively through innovative and a transparent approach to media buying. The results speak for themselves – from improved attention metrics and reduced CPA to significantly increased real-user reach validated by the Fiducia study."*
>
> - **Katya Zapolnova**, Digital Media & Data-Driven Marketing Lead, EMEA, Mattel

A measured lift in recall or favourability is the leading indicator of commercial behaviour. Brand change is the mechanism that turns attentive reach into a store visit, a site action or a sale.

STAGE THREE OF THREE · THE DESTINATION

Stage three: business outcomes

This is the top of the ladder and the real goal, the one number that aligns advertiser, platform and buyer. Here we make business outcomes **measurable rather than assumed**, and connect media investment to commercial results online and offline. These are the things a brand carries into the boardroom: sales, share, distribution, brand equity, and, where it is genuinely the right KPI, return on ad spend. This is the far side of the Translation Break, the business outcome stated in the client's own language.

The measurement falls into a few families, and the principle behind all of them is the same: compare what happened among people the campaign reached against a credible picture of what would have happened anyway, so the result is incremental rather than coincident. Online, that runs through our own measurement tags, which capture transactions, registrations and on-site actions with post-click and post-view windows, feeding conversion, ROI and ROAS reporting and the optimisation engine at the same time. Offline sales, the harder problem, are read through a control-versus-exposed design with specialist partners: a set of stores or regions is held back as a control while others run the campaign, and the difference in real sales between them becomes the measured uplift and the ROI; where the data allows, the same logic runs at household level through retailer loyalty data. Physical footfall is measured the same way, matching real store visits among exposed audiences against a control through panel partners in the markets that support it. And on the boardroom's own terms, marketing-mix modelling, we are deliberate about our role: we do not run a proprietary model, and we do not ask anyone to adopt one. What we do is feed clean, granular exposure data into the client's own or a third-party model, so programmatic is represented accurately in the mix the CFO already trusts. We name partners such as Circana for offline sales or Kantar for footfall as examples; which partner and which method fit a given campaign is a question of market, budget and the data a client wants to see to evaluate outcomes.

That last point deserves saying plainly, because it is where a lot of measurement oversells itself. Serious business-outcome measurement is usually bespoke. A control-versus-exposed sales study or a footfall panel exists only in certain markets and needs minimum scale to be valid, and conversion-lift testing in particular is a controlled, reactive instrument rather than something left running by default. We tell clients what we can measure, where and how, and we flag what we cannot rather than implying we can.

RETIF is the cleanest statement of the rung. A French B2B retailer with more than 170,000 products and over 100 customer segments, RETIF measured its programmatic in revenue rather than impressions. Adlook's audience technology handled the precision that fragmented professional base demands, dynamic creative tailored the message across segments, and the campaign returned €2.10 for every euro spent, a **210% return on ad spend**, alongside 8.1 million in reach and triple the client's benchmark click-through rate.

> *"Adlook delivered a highly personalized campaign. With over 170,000 products and more than 100 customer segments, their technology enabled tailored customer journeys that translated into strong performance across key KPIs, leading to high brand visibility and revenue growth."*
>
> \- **Thina Cadierno**, Global CEO, RETIF

The British Red Cross campaign shows the same discipline applied to acquisition, and it is a good example of incrementality measured rather than assumed. Working with The Kite Factory, the activation reached high-intent donors through Adlook's audience technology and custom contextual models, with no third-party cookies, and the results were read against a held-out control: a **24% lower cost per acquisition**, exposed users converting 36% better than the unexposed group, and a 44% rise in users returning for two or more sessions.

> *"The Adlook team have provided excellent customer service from initial onboarding through to constant in-flight optimisation. They go the extra mile, offering proactive ideas and added value to maximise success – simply because they care."*
>
> \- **Ben Foster**, Chief Operating Officer, The Kite Factory

THE HARDEST CLIMB: CONNECTED TV

Connected TV is where the ladder is hardest to climb and most worth climbing. It is usually filed under awareness alone, on the assumption that a big-screen impression is the end of the story. It does not have to be. Run properly, CTV can be measured all the way from a clean media foundation up to a business outcome - and the discipline that gets it there is the same ordered climb as everywhere else, applied to the channel's particular problem.

That problem is identity. Unlike the web and mobile, CTV runs across fragmented, largely closed ecosystems, and a single household shows up as a crowd of disconnected devices - a smart TV, a tablet, a phone, a laptop - each counted as a separate anonymous user. Until those signals are resolved back to one household, every number above them is unreliable. The resolution layer is a household graph: device-level signals, including the household's network-level identifiers, are stitched into a single household node, so the various screens in one home are understood as one home rather than several strangers. Deduplicated frequency, genuine incremental-reach measurement and cross-channel overlap detection are all impossible without that step, and a reach figure built on un-resolved devices is fiction - the same household counted several times and reported as scale. So household-level identity resolution is the precondition for the channel being measurable at all, not an analytics nicety bolted on at the end. It is also what makes the upper rungs possible on CTV in the first place, brand-lift measurement included.

With identity resolved, the media rung becomes real. Reaching the right households starts with audience quality and premium big-screen supply secured through programmatic guaranteed and private marketplace deals, so the contacts are both high-quality and in environments worth being in. Resolution then lets us separate net-new households from those already reached, cap frequency at the household rather than the device, and read incremental reach honestly — genuinely new homes, not re-exposures dressed up as growth.

The climb from media to business runs through the engine. As overlap between publishers rises, the deep-learning bidder moves spend off saturated households and onto net-new, unexposed ones while holding weekly frequency steady - chasing the incremental-reach signal rather than a proxy for it. And because exposure is tied to a household, the channel can be measured downstream: household-level visit rates, on-site actions and, where the data supports it, sales attribution - a traceable line from a big-screen impression to a digital action, read against a control so the result is incremental rather than coincident. Put household identity, deep-learning optimisation and downstream measurement together and CTV stops being a branding luxury. It becomes a channel that competes, on the open internet, with the closed measurement of the walled gardens accountable on the same business terms as everything else on the ladder.

Conclusion: the outcome is the destination

Programmatic is maturing. AI is moving it off vanity metrics and making the open internet both more addressable and more accountable than it has been. As automation spreads and margins tighten, the business outcome becomes the metric that aligns everyone with a stake in the campaign; the rest are means to it.

That is why the ladder is ordered the way it is, and why it rests on audience quality before anything else. Reach the wrong people and nothing above it matters. Reach the right ones and media quality becomes necessary but not sufficient, brand change becomes the bridge rather than the destination, and business outcomes become the place the climb was always heading. The discipline is to measure each rung honestly, build each one on the rung below, close the Translation Break so every media number maps back to a business goal, and, as soon as the measurement is fast enough, let the business outcome be the objective the platform optimises toward.

This is what it means to be built into a brand and working for its business. The client provides the goal, and the audience strategy, the technology, the creative and the measurement all pull toward it under one roof, reported back in the language the conversation started in. Our growth around the world rests on a straightforward basis: we talk to clients about their actual problems rather than our proxy metrics. Keeping the open internet relevant against the walled gardens depends on exactly this - proving we caused something and tying exposure to real commercial impact. The ladder is how we climb it, and the proof, from Snickers to Nissan to RETIF, the British Red Cross and the connected-TV campaign above, is on the record.

On sourcing. Every product claim here rests on Adlook internal data or a published case study, every client and agency quote is reproduced from the relevant published case study, and every figure is either a named public case or our own measured result.