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**De-Duplication Guide**

De-duplication is a topic that continues to divide opinion within the performance channel. This guide looks to explain what de-duplication is, why advertisers undertake it, the channels that are typically de-duped against and the impact on affiliates.

Because of this impact the document also seeks to examine de-duplication best practices.

**What is de-duplication?**

De-duplication is a process for attributing a sale to one online marketing channel on predefined conditions; these conditions will decide which tracking tag is shown at the confirmation of sale page. It is important to note that **de-duplication is NOT an attribution solution**, rather a way to have a clearer idea on the channel that ultimately delivers a sale.

All channels are paid for in different ways, some just on outcome (affiliate channel) some regardless of outcomes (PPC, Display) so to compare all channels in the same way ignores the various commercial models that are in place. It will always be necessary to assess influence and contribution, even if a channel is not credited with a sale on a last interaction basis.

**Why do advertisers de-dupe?**

Advertisers are increasingly utilising a number of paid for online marketing channels. De-duplication ensures that these sales are not being paid for more than once and are awarded to the channel that has delivered the sale based on a predetermined set of rules – typically last click. Advertisers have always sought clarity on which channels close a sale and last click credit through de-duplication has been standard practice in the channel for a number of years.

**What channels ARE typically de-duped against?**

De-duplication policies will vary depending on individual advertisers. Larger advertisers may be utilising more paid for marketing channels, smaller advertisers potentially just one or two, but the following channels are typically and popularly de-duped against:

**Affiliate Networks** – In the event of an affiliate programme being run through more than one affiliate network, it is important that they are de-duped against one another.

This can be carried out using conditional tracking.

This means that only the last referring affiliates tag will be fired on the confirmation page. If conditional tracking is not in place, an advertiser could be paying two affiliates for the same sale. For example, an Affiliate Window publisher could have had their link to an advertiser clicked on after the same consumer had clicked on another networks publisher's link to the same advertiser. If conditional tracking is not in place, both of the tags will fire and each affiliate will be credited for the same sale.

**Generic PPC** – There is a feeling that generic PPC offers advertisers incremental value. Therefore it is increasingly common for them to de-duplicate against generic PPC.

A consumer that clicks on a generic PPC ad following clicking on an affiliate site, it could be said is more likely to be looking for information on the product/service before transacting. The generic search could be the influencing factor in converting the sale, hence the de-duplication policy.

**Email** – Advertisers will regularly send out emails to their customer base. These are viewed as strong acquisition and engagement tools and therefore if their email is the last click within the path to conversion, it is more common for this channel to de-duplicate against affiliate activity. This can be seen as an influencing the transaction on a last click basis.

**Display/Retargeting** (**ON A CLICK BASIS**) – If there has been a click present on a display/retargeting ad, it could be argued that the click held some influence over the conversion.

**Direct Partnerships** – Some advertisers may have direct partnerships in place. For example, advertisers within the travel sector may work directly with the large meta search partners. These partners will have commercial relationships in place and could be seen as similar to an additional publisher network. Advertisers may de-dupe against these partners as they would against another affiliate network.

**What channels ARE NOT typically de-duped against?**

**Brand PPC** – While an advertiser might argue that generic search can be legitimately de-duped against, Affiliate Window has always recommended that advertisers do not de-dupe against brand PPC. In this instance, the publisher could have a lot of influence over a sale, only for a consumer to revert to Google, remember the brand name and click through a PPC link.

**Natural Search** – It has always been uncommon for advertisers to de-duplicate against natural search. It is felt that often consumers will simply click on the top brand listing, adding little value to the purchase path.

**Direct to URL** – Affiliate Window has also always recommended that direct to URL should not be de-duped against. An affiliate partner could have had a lot of influence over the purchasing decision, only for the consumer to go back through typing in a URL directly. It could be argued the publisher has had a significant influence over the sale.

**Display/Retargeting (on a Post Impression basis**) – While de-duping on a click basis for display/retargeting can be seen as a legitimate action, this should not be de-duplicated against on a PI basis. Just because a display advert is shown does not mean that it has had influence over the sale, or indeed it has even been seen. If there is an affiliate click present, a display/retargeting PI cookie should not overwrite this.

Our approach to cookie hierarchies and the type of activity that will overwrite other cookie activity is outlined later in this document.

If these channels are de-duped against, it could be seen as penalising affiliates for their efforts and there is likely to be a negative response from them. If there are competitors with more favourable de-duplication policies, publishers are likely to be inclined to promote them.

At Affiliate Window we require advertisers to declare their de-duplication policies and this information is publicly available to all affiliates on the network.

**How does retargeting fit in with de-duplication?**

Re-targeting traditionally sat within the realms of display but more recently, a number of advertisers have run this activity on a performance basis through the affiliate channel. In doing so it is easier to put the required controls in place. It is important for re-targeting to be de-duped effectively and if there has not been a click on a retargeting banner, the preceding click (if there is one present) should be rewarded the sale. Our cookie hierarchy (found later in this document) outlines how this works in practice.

If retargeting is being run independently of the affiliate channel it is difficult to control and the companies that offer this solution are likely to require payment on a Post Impression basis too. Without a click being present, there is little evidence to suggest that the retargeted ad held any influence over the conversion. The success of a retargeting campaign should be closely monitored to decipher how incremental these sales are and the impact it has upon the other online touch points.

The IAB has produced a document that outlines the best practices when running behavioural retargeting within the affiliate channel.

http://www.iabaffiliatemarketing.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/IAB-AMC-BEST-PRACTICE-GUIDE-REMARKETING-RETARGETING-AND-BEHAVIOURAL-ADVERTISING-IN-THE-AFFILIATE-CHANNEL.pdf

**Cookie hierarchy**

Affiliate Window has a cookie hierarchy in place to differentiate between soft and hard cookies and how this impacts upon cookie overwriting.

You can read more on our cookie hierarchy policy here.

**Publisher visibility**

There are two ways in which advertisers are able to de-dupe sales across the affiliate channel. They can either de-dupe at source, or manually de-dupe.

**De-dupe at source** – this means that the advertiser has an automatic process in place that will de-dupe sales at the point they track. By de-duping at source, these sales will not appear within the interface and will not affect advertiser statistics such as validation rate. This also makes the process

of de-duplication more efficient for the advertiser without having to manually delete the duplicate sales within the interface. The downside of de-duping at source is there is a lack of visibility for publishers. They will not know how many sales they were involved in that were ultimately attributed to another channel on a last click basis.

**Manual de-dupe** – this means that all sales where the affiliate was the last affiliate referrer within the path to conversion will track within the interface. It will not automatically take into account the additional channels that were last click (where applicable). This method provides greater visibility for publishers but in order for this to be worthwhile it is vital that full visibility is provided on the channel that was rewarded the sale on a last click. A downside of this method is that programme statistics will be affected with high deletion rates.

**Single Session Based De-Duping**

While the majority of advertisers will have a cookie length in place (typically 30 days), some advertisers work on a single session cookie. This means that if the transaction does not occur within the same session as the click through, the affiliate will not be rewarded the sale.

We would typically advise advertisers against working on a single session policy although this can be more relevant for lead based campaigns.

**How does attribution modelling fit in with de-duplication?**

As mentioned above, de-duplication is not an attribution solution. Attribution modelling is a tool to understand each of the individual touch points within the customer's path to conversion. The aim is to provide insight into how to spend marketing budget most effectively rather than offer split commissions to each involvement within a transaction. Attribution modelling allows advertisers to understand the typical customer journey and presents opportunities for them to improve and invest in key areas.

Overall it is critical that the **VALUE** is understood. In theory an advertiser could de-dupe everything as long as contribution is recognised. If an affiliate contributes to 20% of sales but is only rewarded on complete de-duplication for 5%, there needs to be recognition that there is a gap between the sales delivered and the value added. In addition to this it is essential that the advertiser is clear in communicating this to their advertiser base.

Further reading on our thoughts on value attribution can be found here.

The work that needs to be carried out to understand contribution and influence is complex which is why de-duplication has been viewed as an easy way to apportion sales. That the project requires thought and resource should not dissuade any advertiser from wanting to undertake the work. Ultimately producing this insight for your individual affiliate partners will lead to a better understanding of what they can deliver, in turn highlighting who you need to focus you attention on in order to build stronger relationships.

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If you would like to speak to us in more detail about de-duplication policies or implementing attribution modelling, please contact strategy@affiliatewindow.com.