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Game On: Where Ad Meets Play

Digital Advertising - MSBX 5320

Project Report

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# **Introduction**

Digital advertising continues to evolve at a rapid pace, with emerging platforms and consumer behaviors challenging traditional measurement approaches. One of the most promising yet complex frontiers for digital advertising is the gaming industry—a dynamic ecosystem where audiences are deeply engaged, interactions are highly immersive, and traditional advertising formats are often incompatible. In this context, measuring ad effectiveness becomes not only technically demanding but also strategically essential.

The Measurement and Analytics area within advertising technology (AdTech) plays a pivotal role in enabling advertisers to understand performance, justify budget allocations, and optimize campaign strategies. It provides the quantitative backbone for campaign evaluation, ensuring that advertising dollars are spent efficiently and with demonstrable return on investment (ROI). However, when it comes to in-game advertising, the conventional metrics—such as impressions, click-through rates (CTR), and conversions—often fall short. These metrics fail to capture the nuances of user attention, engagement, and brand impact in environments where ads are woven into gameplay rather than displayed around content.

The global gaming market, projected to reach $312 billion by 2027 (Statista, 2024), represents a massive opportunity for advertisers. This economic scale, combined with high user engagement levels, underscores the urgency of developing sophisticated measurement and verification tools tailored specifically to gaming. Advertisers require more than just ad delivery—they need accurate, transparent, and trustworthy insights into how players interact with branded content inside games.

This project aims to explore the current landscape of in-game ad measurement by comparing two leading companies in the AdTech space: Anzu.io, a pioneer in immersive in-game ad delivery, and Integral Ad Science (IAS), a global leader in digital ad verification and brand safety. By analyzing their platforms, methodologies, and measurement capabilities, we seek to understand how each contributes to solving the unique challenges of advertising in gaming environments.

The broader objective is to synthesize best practices and uncover areas where innovation is still needed—ultimately contributing to the development of more robust, accurate, and advertiser-friendly measurement frameworks for in-game advertising.

# **Project Overview**

## **Objective**

The core objective of this project is to evaluate and compare measurement methodologies in the context of in-game advertising, with a focus on how ad effectiveness, engagement, and ROI are quantified within immersive gaming environments. By examining the capabilities of two prominent AdTech firms—Anzu.io and Integral Ad Science (IAS)—we aim to understand how these companies address the unique challenges of tracking and verifying digital advertisements within video games.

This analysis will also contribute to broader discussions on the future of advertising metrics, the role of third-party verification, and how advertisers can make data-driven decisions in emerging digital contexts.

## **Rationale**

With increasing consumer time spent on gaming platforms and the rapid growth of esports and interactive media, advertisers are eager to tap into this space. However, their willingness to invest hinges on one crucial factor: confidence in measurement.

Traditional metrics such as CTR and impressions are inadequate in non-linear, player-controlled environments. As a result, advertisers face a data gap that inhibits effective budgeting, targeting, and performance optimization. There is a critical need for new measurement paradigms that account for variables such as:

* Viewability within 3D spaces
* Time-in-view across different gameplay dynamics
* User attention without direct interaction (e.g., passive brand exposure)
* Fraud risks and brand safety concerns in game-generated environments

This project is designed to address these gaps by exploring real-world implementations of in-game ad measurement technologies.

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## **Scope**

This project encompasses the following key areas:

* **Landscape Review**: Understand the current state of in-game ad measurement, including the primary challenges, opportunities, and trends shaping the industry.
* **Platform Analysis – Anzu.io**: Investigate Anzu’s approach to native in-game advertising, focusing on their measurement infrastructure, key metrics, advertiser reporting capabilities, and how they quantify engagement and ROI.
* **Platform Analysis – Integral Ad Science (IAS)**: Evaluate IAS’s verification solutions and how they are applied to gaming environments, particularly in the areas of viewability, fraud detection, and brand safety.
* **Comparative Analysis**: Examine how Anzu and IAS complement or differ in their approach to ad measurement. Assess strengths, weaknesses, and potential synergies.
* **Strategic Insights & Recommendations**: Provide actionable insights for advertisers, developers, and AdTech stakeholders looking to improve or implement in-game advertising strategies.

## **Research Methodology**

The project will rely on the following methods:

* **Company Profiling**: Deep-dive analysis of Anzu.io and IAS based on publicly available resources, product documentation, client case studies, and media coverage.
* **Comparative Evaluation**: Use of structured evaluation criteria such as accuracy, transparency, scalability, and advertiser usability to compare the two platforms.
* **Synthesis and Reporting**: Creation of a comprehensive report and presentation that clearly communicates findings and strategic implications.

# **Company 1 Analysis: Anzu.io**

Anzu.io is a leader in programmatic in-game advertising, offering native, non-intrusive ads integrated directly into 3D environments. Their solution allows brands to reach gamers in a seamless and immersive way without disrupting gameplay.

## **Key Features**

* **Programmatic Advertising Integration**

Anzu's platform supports programmatic ad buying, enabling advertisers to serve dynamic ads across various gaming platforms. With direct integration with over 40 programmatic partners, including major demand-side platforms (DSPs), advertisers can efficiently manage and scale their campaigns.

* **Advanced Measurement and Analytics**

Anzu employs a patented 3D ad tracking engine that measures intrinsic ads in dynamic gaming environments across all major platforms. This technology collects data points such as average screen coverage, occlusions, virtual world position, and orientation relative to the user's view. These metrics are combined with conversion and session data to optimize campaign delivery and provide media value to advertisers. ​

Additionally, Anzu has partnered with Integral Ad Science (IAS) to provide third-party verification for ad viewability and invalid traffic (IVT) measurement, ensuring transparency and trust in campaign performance.

* **Compliance and Brand Safety**

The platform is compliant with major data protection regulations, including GDPR, CCPA, and COPPA, ensuring user privacy and data security. Anzu also collaborates with industry bodies like the IAB and MRC to adhere to standardized measurement guidelines for in-game advertising. ​

## **Ad Formats**

Anzu offers a suite of ad formats designed to blend seamlessly into the gaming environment:​

* **Blended Display Ads**: Static images integrated into the game world, such as billboards or posters.​
* **Blended Video Ads**: Short video clips displayed on in-game screens or surfaces.​
* **Custom Ads**: Tailored ad experiences that match the game's aesthetic and context.​

These formats are designed to be non-disruptive, maintaining the integrity of the gaming experience while delivering brand messages effectively. ​

## **Targeting Capabilities**

Anzu's platform provides advanced targeting options without relying on personal data. Advertisers can utilize contextual targeting based on game genre, environment, and player behavior. Additionally, the platform supports targeting through:

**Privacy-First Targeting Approach:**

* Designed to comply with GDPR, CCPA, COPPA, and other privacy regulations.
* Avoids reliance on personal identifiable information (PII).
* Focuses on contextual and consent-based targeting methods.

**Contextual Targeting:**

* Matches ads to game genre, environment, and player behavior.
* Ensures ads feel natural within the gaming experience.
* Example: Sportswear brands advertising within sports simulation games.

**Geolocation-Based Targeting (via IP Address):**

* Delivers ads relevant to the player’s geographic location.
* Enables region-specific promotions, local store ads, or culturally relevant messaging.
* Maintains user anonymity while enhancing ad relevance.

**Census Data Targeting:**

* Uses aggregated demographic data (age, income, education by region) to refine audience segmentation.
* Supports broad targeting strategies without accessing individual user data.
* Provides socio-demographic insights while preserving privacy.

**Opted-In Identifiers:**

* Allows targeting based on device IDs or hashed emails when users have given explicit consent.
* Enables remarketing and personalized messaging for opted-in audiences.
* Ensures full transparency and user control over data sharing.

**Key Benefits for Advertisers:**

* Maximizes ad relevance and engagement rates.
* Enhances user trust through ethical data practices.
* Supports highly strategic and efficient in-game advertising campaigns.

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# **Brand Uplift Through Gaming: Tommy Hilfiger x Anzu.io**

## **Overview**

Tommy Hilfiger partnered with Anzu.io to promote its "Classics Reborn Spring ’23" collection, aiming to enhance brand visibility and consumer perception within the gaming community. Recognizing the potential of the gaming audience—known for its high engagement and digital fluency—the campaign targeted gamers in the United States across both mobile and PC platforms. The objective was to elevate brand awareness and favorability while driving meaningful consumer actions such as purchase consideration and brand recommendation..​

## **Strategy**

The campaign capitalized on Anzu.io’s intrinsic in-game advertising technology, which embeds ads natively into the game environment, allowing for a non-intrusive and immersive experience. Tommy Hilfiger used a mix of blended display and video ads that appeared on virtual billboards and signage within the games. Creatives were designed to align with different demographic segments, with regular content refreshes implemented to avoid saturation and ensure continued engagement. This approach enabled Tommy Hilfiger to maintain consistent brand visibility while preserving the integrity of the gameplay experience.

## **Measurement & Verification**

To ensure the campaign's effectiveness and integrity, Tommy Hilfiger worked with several third-party verification partners. A comprehensive brand lift study was conducted by Comscore to quantify the impact of in-game exposure on consumer perception. Viewability standards were validated by Oracle MOAT, while Integral Ad Science (IAS) monitored for invalid traffic and ensured ad safety. These collaborations added transparency and credibility to the reported outcomes, reinforcing trust in the results delivered through Anzu’s platform.

## **Key Results**

The campaign achieved impressive brand lift across multiple key performance indicators. There was a 14-point increase in ad recall, indicating that players not only noticed the ads but remembered the brand after exposure. Brand favorability rose by 20 points, suggesting a stronger positive perception of Tommy Hilfiger among gamers. Additionally, there was a 24-point increase in brand recommendation intent, and a 23-point lift in purchase intent, highlighting that the campaign not only influenced opinions but also drove behavioral shifts toward the brand. These results underscore the effectiveness of immersive in-game advertising in generating both cognitive and action-oriented consumer responses.

Tommy Hilfiger’s campaign with Anzu.io exemplifies how well-executed in-game advertising can lead to tangible brand benefits. By leveraging Anzu’s native ad formats, demographic targeting, and third-party measurement capabilities, the brand was able to drive meaningful engagement and significant uplift in critical brand metrics. This case provides strong evidence for the strategic value of in-game advertising and its potential to deliver measurable ROI in a rapidly growing digital channel.

With over 3.2 billion gamers globally, the potential for advertisers to leverage this dynamic channel to connect with diverse audiences has never been greater. The gaming landscape offers a unique opportunity to engage consumers in immersive environments where traditional advertising methods often fall short.

Intrinsic in-game advertising (IIGA) has emerged as a powerful solution that allows advertisers to integrate their messages seamlessly into gaming experiences. By positioning ads within virtual worlds—such as on billboards around sports stadiums, alongside racetracks, and on buildings — IIGA replicates the natural ad placements found in real-world environments, ensuring that the gaming experience remains uninterrupted and meaningful.

However, alongside this opportunity comes the critical need for robust and accurate measurement. As the industry continues to evolve, understanding and optimizing the impact of in-game ads is essential not only for demonstrating return on investment (ROI) but also for building trust with advertisers and enhancing the gaming experience for players. The non-clickable nature of intrinsic in-game ads adds an extra layer of complexity, making it crucial to adopt innovative metrics that reflect the true value of these engagements.

# **Company 2 Analysis: Integral Ad Science (IAS)**

Integral Ad Science (IAS) is a global leader in digital media quality. It delivers technologies and data-driven solutions to help advertisers ensure their ads appear in view, by real people, in brand-safe environments, and within the right contextual content. IAS's tools allow for improved media efficiency, effectiveness, and return on ad spend.

## **Product Offerings**

**Ad Verification & Viewability:** IAS provides comprehensive verification tools that confirm if an ad is actually seen by a human user. It evaluates viewability based on time and pixel coverage, ensuring impressions are counted only when meaningful. This helps advertisers improve ROI by focusing only on impactful media placements.

**Brand Safety & Suitability:** This feature helps ensure that ads are not placed next to content that could harm a brand's reputation. IAS uses AI to classify content and assign safety scores, allowing brands to choose the level of sensitivity. It also includes suitability filters that align placements with the brand's tone and target audience.

## **Methods​**

* **Fraud Prevention:** IAS offers tools to detect and block invalid traffic, including sophisticated bots and domain spoofing. It provides advertisers with fraud reports and scores to prevent wasted ad spend. Their detection mechanisms are updated frequently to stay ahead of emerging threats in the ad ecosystem.
* **Contextual Targeting:** IAS uses natural language processing and image recognition to analyze web pages and video content. This allows ads to be shown in environments that are semantically relevant and emotionally resonant. The result is higher engagement rates and improved brand perception.
* **Pre-bid Integrations:** IAS integrates directly with major DSPs to apply verification filters before the bidding process begins. This ensures that advertisers don’t waste money bidding on inventory that doesn’t meet their brand safety or viewability standards. These pre-bid segments can be customized for each campaign based on advertiser needs.

## **Technology Stack**

* **AI and Machine Learning:** IAS utilizes advanced AI algorithms to detect trends, classify content, and predict outcomes in real time. These models are trained on vast datasets that span the digital media ecosystem. They continuously learn and adapt, enhancing accuracy and speed over time.
* **NLP and Computer Vision:** Natural Language Processing is used to assess the tone, sentiment, and topic of content, while computer vision evaluates images and video frames. This dual approach enables precise and nuanced analysis of ad environments. It ensures brand safety not only at the textual but also at the visual level.
* **Omnichannel Support:** IAS offers its services across a variety of digital channels including desktop, mobile apps, and connected TV (CTV). This ensures consistency in measurement and protection regardless of the user's platform. It helps brands manage campaigns holistically and at scale.

## **Targeting Capabilities**

* **Advertisers and Brands:** IAS empowers brands to maximize their media investments while maintaining a positive reputation. By preventing fraud and improving contextual placement, brands see higher return on ad spend.
* **Agencies:** Media and advertising agencies use IAS for planning and performance optimization across multiple clients. It helps streamline reporting and ensure compliance with brand safety guidelines. Agencies can also access customizable metrics for different client needs.
* **Publishers:** IAS enables publishers to classify and package their inventory in ways that align with advertiser needs. This increases trust in the inventory and allows publishers to command higher CPMs. It also helps publishers comply with safety and quality standards.
* **Platforms:** Major platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Meta integrate IAS tools to enhance their advertising ecosystems. This makes IAS a trusted third-party partner for media quality verification. These integrations also streamline campaign setup for advertisers.

## **Unique Value Proposition**

* **Comprehensive real-time media quality tools:** IAS offers end-to-end solutions covering all aspects of ad quality, from fraud detection to brand safety. These tools operate in real time, allowing for immediate corrections.
* **Extensive platform integrations:** IAS has built deep integrations with leading DSPs, SSPs, and walled gardens. These partnerships make it easier for advertisers to apply IAS’s tools across their campaigns. As a result, brands gain unified insights across platforms.
* **Granular targeting and verification across 100+ countries:** IAS supports global campaigns with local-level precision. This includes language-specific analysis and cultural contextual understanding. It ensures brand safety and effectiveness even in diverse international markets.
* **Fast-response analytics dashboard for optimization:** IAS provides a user-friendly dashboard that delivers key insights in near real time. Advertisers can adjust campaign parameters on the fly based on live performance data. This agility enhances campaign success and ROI.

## **Recent Developments**

* **Acquisition of Context (AI contextual startup):** This move strengthens IAS’s contextual intelligence by adding proprietary NLP and sentiment tools. It expands the company’s capabilities in analyzing non-English content. This positions IAS as a leader in multilingual contextual targeting.
* **Expansion into CTV verification:** IAS has broadened its reach to Connected TV, offering verification and viewability tools tailored for the streaming environment. This ensures brands can maintain media quality in rapidly growing CTV channels. It supports dynamic ad insertion and frame-level video analysis.
* **Enhanced pre-bid integration with DV360, The Trade Desk:** IAS has deepened its partnerships with major demand-side platforms. This allows for seamless application of verification criteria during media buying. It improves efficiency and enhances targeting precision.

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# **IAS Enhances ROAS for Major CPG Brand Through Improved Viewability**

**Client**: *Leading Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) Brand*

*This case study illustrates how IAS's focus on ad viewability can lead to measurable improvements in advertising ROI.*

## **Campaign Objective**

IAS, in partnership with Catalina, conducted a study to assess the impact of ad viewability on sales outcomes for a leading consumer packaged goods (CPG) brand. The campaign aimed to boost in-store sales and maximize return on ad spend (ROAS) through digital display advertisements across mobile and desktop platforms..​

## **Challenge**

The primary challenge was to determine whether ensuring ads were actually seen by consumers would translate into higher in-store purchases and improved ROAS. The CPG brand sought to understand the correlation between ad viewability and tangible sales results.

## **IAS Implementation**

In collaboration with Catalina, a leader in shopper intelligence, IAS conducted a study from May to July 2022.

The study segmented 14.6 million anonymized households into two groups:

* **In-View Group**: Households exposed to ads that met IAS's viewability standards.
* **Not-In-View Group**: Households exposed to ads that did not meet viewability standards.​

The goal was to measure the incremental sales lift and ROAS attributable to viewable ads.​

## **Results**

The study revealed that the in-view group achieved a 180% higher incremental ROAS compared to the not-in-view group. Additionally, 74% of the incremental sales from the test campaign were driven by the in-view audience. The analysis also identified that ads viewed for 3 to 10 seconds yielded the highest incremental sales, indicating this duration as the optimal time-in-view range.

## **Key Takeaways**

The findings underscore the critical role of ad viewability in driving tangible business outcomes. Ensuring ads are viewable significantly enhances their effectiveness in driving purchases. Moreover, there's a sweet spot of 3 to 10 seconds where ad exposure is most effective. Leveraging precise metrics like viewability can lead to substantial improvements in campaign performance.​

This case study demonstrates the importance of media quality in digital advertising and its direct impact on consumer behavior and sales performance.

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# **Comparative Analysis: Anzu.io vs IAS**

| **Features/Attribute** | **Anzu.io** | **Integral Ad Science (IAS)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Core Focus | In-game advertising (gaming environments) | Digital media quality and ad verification |
| Technology | Blended in-games ads with real-time rendering & programmatic integration | ML, NLP, Computer Vision for contextual analysis and fraud detection. |
| Primary Use Case | Non-intrusive games ads, brand-safe gaming integration | Preventing fraud, improving viewability, ensuring brand safety |
| Ad Formats Supported | In-game display, video, programmatic | Display, video, mobile, CTV |
| Target Clients | Game developers, advertisers in gaming | Advertisers, agencies, publishers, platforms. |
| Fraud Detection | Basic invalid traffic filtering | Advanced IVT protection |
| Brand Suitability | Ensures ads match game context | Deep contextual and semantic analysis for brand suitability |
| Key Partners | Xbox, Unity, Magnite | YouTube, Meta, TikTok, The Trade Desk |
| Global Reach | Global game network | 100+ countries across web, mobile, CTV |
| Recent Expansion | Console and CTV integration | Acquired Context, CTV verification expansion |

## **Summary**

This report provides a comparative analysis between two prominent companies in the digital advertising ecosystem: **Integral Ad Science (IAS)** and **Anzu.io**. Our objective was to explore the operational focus, technological strengths, and market positioning of both organizations. We began by outlining IAS's product offerings in-depth, examining tools such as ad verification, fraud prevention, contextual targeting, and brand safety.

We then compared these capabilities against those of Anzu.io, which specializes in immersive, in-game advertising experiences. A comprehensive table highlighted key differentiators across product features, target clients, global reach, and technology stacks. To illustrate real-world relevance, we included a detailed IAS case study showcasing the measurable impact of its ad viewability tools on ROAS for a CPG brand.

# **Recommendations**

Based on the comparative evaluation of Anzu.io and IAS, we offer the following strategic recommendations for advertisers, game developers, and AdTech stakeholders seeking to implement or enhance in-game advertising strategies:

**1. Leverage the Strengths of Both Platforms**

Advertisers should adopt a hybrid strategy that combines Anzu.io's immersive in-game formats with IAS’s robust verification and fraud prevention tools. While Anzu enables brand integration into gameplay environments, IAS ensures that such campaigns meet industry standards for viewability, safety, and efficiency. Utilizing both platforms in tandem can significantly enhance trust, performance, and measurability.

**2. Adopt Innovative Metrics Beyond Clicks**

Traditional KPIs like CTR are insufficient for measuring engagement in immersive environments. We recommend that brands adopt advanced metrics such as:

* Average screen coverage (ASC)
* Time-in-view within 3D spaces
* Intrinsic brand recall These metrics offer deeper insight into passive brand exposure and emotional engagement, aligning measurement with the realities of gaming interactions.

**3.** **Prioritize Third-Party Verification**

Campaigns should integrate third-party verification tools (like IAS, Oracle MOAT, or Comscore) to validate results and maintain transparency. This is especially crucial in gaming, where the nonlinear nature of user experiences makes self-reported metrics less reliable. Third-party oversight enhances advertiser confidence and supports long-term investments in the channel.

**4. Experiment with Contextual Targeting Over Personalization**

As data privacy regulations tighten, platforms like Anzu that focus on contextual targeting (game genre, player behavior, virtual environment) offer a privacy-conscious alternative to behaviorally targeted ads. Advertisers should explore how contextual relevance can drive performance without compromising user trust.

**5. Educate Stakeholders on Measurement Limitations**

In-game advertising is still maturing, and its metrics are not universally standardized. We recommend stakeholder education around what current measurement tools can and cannot do, and the importance of interpreting brand lift, viewability, and engagement in context rather than in isolation.

# **Conclusion**

In the rapidly evolving world of digital advertising, in-game environments represent a powerful but complex frontier. Our comparative study of Anzu.io and Integral Ad Science (IAS) reveals that while each platform brings distinct strengths, they are most effective when used together.

Anzu.io excels in delivering immersive, non-disruptive ad experiences that respect the integrity of gameplay while offering innovative formats like virtual billboards and in-game videos. Their contextual targeting and partnerships with verification leaders position them well for the future of privacy-compliant advertising.

IAS, on the other hand, provides a foundational layer of accountability, ensuring that ads are viewed by real humans in brand-safe environments. Their machine learning, computer vision, and cross-platform integrations help advertisers validate campaign effectiveness and reduce media waste.

Together, these platforms address both sides of the in-game advertising equation: engaging users and proving impact. As gaming continues to dominate user attention globally, advertisers must embrace a dual-focus approach—delivering immersive content while upholding rigorous standards of measurement and trust.

To truly capitalize on this channel, advertisers and developers must go beyond the novelty of in-game ads and adopt frameworks that align business objectives with credible measurement practices. In doing so, they can unlock not just reach, but relevance, resonance, and long-term brand value.

# **Appendix**

[A Complete Guide to Targeting in Intrinsic In-Game Ads](https://www.anzu.io/case-studies/tommy-hilfiger-case-study)

[IAS Case Study Reveals In-View Ads Tripled the Return on Ad Spend Compared to Not-In-View Placements](https://integralads.com/news/ias-driving-outcomes-with-viewability/?utm_source)

**Chatgpt Prompts**

* How can I compare two companies working in different areas of digital advertising (Anzu.io and IAS)?
* What problems do advertisers face in measuring in-game ads, and how are these companies solving them?
* What can I learn from real brand case studies like Tommy Hilfiger and the CPG brand?
* What advice can I give to advertisers based on everything I researched?
* How should I organize my report so it’s easy to read and tells a complete story?