

Mobile Attribution FAQ

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1. At a very top level, what is attribution?

Quite simply, attribution in marketing is the linking of an outcome, for example a sale, to the advertising activity that specifically caused it.

Typically, advertisers will be running lots of different marketing activity at the same time – which could include both online and offline advertising – so having an attribution strategy that measures the value of each channel will help allocate the right budget to the different tactics being used as part of any one campaign.

2. What is the purchase funnel?

The purchase funnel is used to help us understand the flow of a consumer's purchase behaviour. Fully understanding the user journey is crucial to optimising marketing efforts, as well as business growth. There are a few different models and terms that all essentially mean the same thing but if you use the 4 stages below you won't go far wrong...

- Awareness
- Familiarity
- Consideration
- Purchase

Each stage involves different behaviour on the part of the consumer and requires specific approaches by the brand if the person is to be moved 'down the funnel' to the next stage effectively. Here are a couple of pointers about effective communication strategies at each stage of the funnel...

- Upper funnel – communicate the brand's core values
- Middle funnel – introduce the product
- Lower funnel – present a call to action to facilitate a conversion

3. What makes attribution on mobile different?

Mobile has changed the rules, consumers now research, sign up, and purchase across multiple different devices. In the desktop world, cookies have been great at making it easy to measure the success of these actions. However, in the mobile world, cookie tracking can be limited which throws up new challenges when attributing the role that mobile has played as part of a campaign.

Successful attribution on mobile requires cross-device reach and measurement. Without a cross-device view you will have an incomplete picture of the effectiveness of your media plan.

Much more on cross-device in the next question!

4. Why is mobile attribution so important?

Mobile attribution is more important now than ever, mainly due to the fact that we spend so much time on our smartphones. As the nature of a consumer's path to purchase becomes more complex, and many conversions still happen on desktop or in store it's important that the right steps are taken to ensure mobile is properly valued.

Conventional models of tracking conversions have under-estimated the role of mobile marketing in the past, creating challenges for marketers trying to prove the value of these efforts. Cross-device tracking, as well as using real world measures (such as measuring how many people visited a store after seeing an ad), starts to ensure activity is measured and the contributions recognised in relation to achieving campaign goals.

Please note: It's important not to measure mobile in isolation. It should be measured as part of a brands wider media strategy.

5. How does attribution cross platform work?

There are two main ways of attribution across platform.

The first is using '**probabilistic**' data...

Probabilistic ID technologies anonymously create a profile of a user, or 'fingerprint', based on a range of data available about their device such as device type, browser version, language settings, or time zone to name just a few. This unique profile is created when the user undertakes an action (such as clicking on an ad) and then when a conversion happens (for example the download of an app). The tracking technology can then match the profiles to determine they are very likely to be the same device, and therefore user.

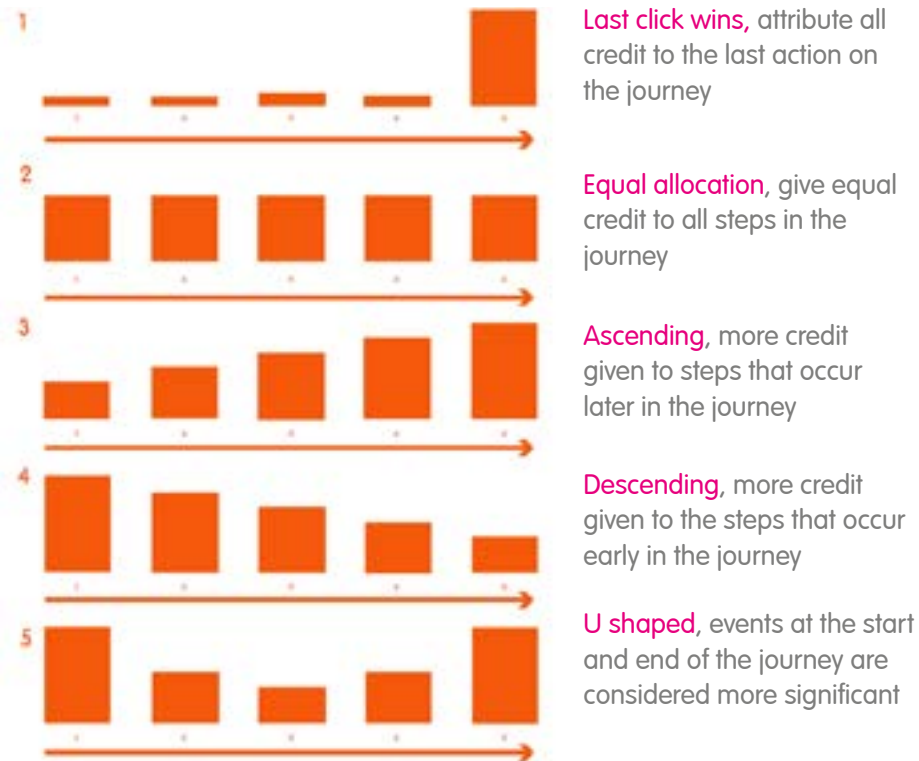
The second is using '**deterministic**' data...

Deterministic data uses single-user logins, matching consumers as they login to accounts across multiple devices. Deterministic data can be built from any sites with large numbers of logged in users across devices. This method relies on a user being logged into that service on every device that they own. Attribution solutions that rely on deterministic data may also extrapolate to cover users that are not logged in across all devices at all times.

6. Should I use different mobile attribution models for different campaign objectives?

Yes, different mobile attribution models should be used for different campaign objectives – each type of activity likely plays a particular role in the overall strategy, and therefore measuring all of these types in the same way and with the same performance indicator could be misleading. Sometimes getting too fixated on a media metric can result in optimisation away from activity that is actually driving business value, so where possible include and measure a variety of key performance indicators (KPIs) in the attribution model for each campaign so that a wider view of the activity's value can be seen.

Here are some examples of key attribution models:



Data-driven attribution models, all of the models highlighted above are rules-based attribution models, which do not work dynamically. Data-driven models are more responsive to changes in media investment and user behavior, and don't rely on a set of rules based on assumptions.

7. Do mobile attribution models take into account the life time value of customers?

The short answer...

Yes, mobile attribution models can certainly take into account life time value (LTV), however there is no hard and fast rule.

If you believe that the lifetime ends at the end of a set period of time, and provides little to no additional value after that point, then having a fixed attribution window can provide enough valuable insights into the quality of a user.

The slightly longer answer...

It's completely up to the brand to decide what model is best for their business – if needed, LTV can be part of that model. For some types of marketers (social gaming clients in particular) it's highly likely that LTV is the model used to plan investment.

Some LTV metrics are easier to measure than others. If a brand wants to measure the success of their app where people always log in, your calculation of life time value is much simpler. You can analyse what people do across the web and app and have a very accurate idea what the LTV of that user is e.g. if the data showed people who installed the app purchased 20% more than web-only users, you could attribute more LTV to prospecting people who downloaded the app.

The key to all of the above is being clear about your objectives as a brand at the start of any campaign so that you can accurately measure its success.

8. What do I need to do in the campaign set up to be able to attribute performance post campaign?

Think about your tracking solutions...

There are multiple well-established attribution partners that enable mobile marketers to measure and attribute specific mobile events to an advertising partner. Before selecting and integrating a specific partner, it is advised to ensure that the specific advertising companies you wish to work with can integrate your attribution solution.

Think cross-device...

Determine a cross-device attribution methodology all parties are comfortable with, and choose a suitable partner that can cover your markets.

Think about location data...

If one of your campaign objectives is to drive footfall to a physical store, identify and geo-fence key locations early on to measure visitations before, during and post campaign to understand the full impact of your advertising.

And finally, think about time...

Define all time frames 'post-campaign' when you anticipate you will want to review the data, including the maximum time frame. This is an often-overlooked step, and sometimes the data cannot be contained or saved for the needed length of time, so when the time comes to review, use or model historical data, it has expired.

9. Is the new data protection law – the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – going to affect mobile attribution?

Yes, and everyone involved in mobile attribution should ensure they're fully up to speed with the new rules. Get it wrong and your company may be subject to a fine of up to 4% of global annual turnover.

The GDPR will apply from 25 May 2018 and with it come a sweep of changes relevant to mobile attribution, much in the same way as with other parts of the digital advertising industry. Chief among them will be the assumption to consider all unique identifiers as 'personal data' – a broader concept than personally identifiable information (PII) – unless a valid argument can be made to treat them as 'anonymous'.

Being able to lawfully process personal data is what the GDPR is all about. To do that, companies will have to consider a number of issues based on the principles of transparency, accountability and user control, including:

- Demonstrably justifying data processing, e.g. through consent
- The benefits of pseudonymising data
- How to transfer data internationally
- What to do in the event of data breaches
- How to respond to individuals requesting information

For more details on the new data protection rules, make sure to regularly visit the data & privacy policy section on the IAB site (<https://iabuk.net/policy/issues/data-and-privacy>) and download the IAB UK member briefing on the GDPR (iabuk.net/GDPRbriefing).

10. What steps do I need to be taking to future proof my mobile attribution strategy?

Here are 5 steps to future proof your attribution strategy:

- 1) Work with trusted partners that provide the latest product features with around attribution.
- 2) Test and view various attribution models and analyse what model works best for your business.
- 3) Understand your current users. Ask why they use your product or service, what is their life time value and how long do they use the product or service - this will help you decide what model works best or enable you to create a new, more effective model.
- 4) Understand the technicalities of how mobile attribution works and the differing technologies that must all work together to be effective.
- 5) Always make sure you compare new actions with a baseline, so that you can quickly identify partners or channels that commit attribution fraud (assigning organic conversions to themselves by fraudulently generating clicks).

Want some more information on attribution?

Head to our Attribution Centre: iabuk.net/research/attribution

Top tips about mobile attribution from our IAB Mobile Steering group members

"The starting point is your audience - who are they, where are they. First you will need to ensure you can decipher and understand what trends your data is showing, which will help you evaluate your consumer acquisition cost or understand life time value of a consumer. Once you have this, you can experiment with a variety of mobile inventory channels, formats and executions to identify what your biggest acquisition channels will be. This is a fast moving, yet exciting space with multiple challenges, so be prepared to run plenty of tests to ensure you stay ahead of the market. And ensure you are working with a robust 3rd party tracking and attribution tool built for mobile."

Jon Hook, VP, Brand and Agencies EMEA, AdColony

"The market asks us to be transparent, but brands need to understand the importance of data transparency from their side too. Brands often have access to a wealth of customer data that could be key in proving ROI."

Charlie Smith, Managing Director, UK, Blis

"Last click, cookie-based solutions used to work well in a world dominated by the desktop but in the mobile first world we live in today it certainly falls short and is limiting the ability of advertisers to maximise ROI."

Ziggy Lin, EMEA DR Measurement Lead, Facebook

"Take care to measure and report on the cross-device behaviour of your customers. Leverage data-driven models to attribute value to multiple touchpoints in an algorithmic way. And finally, look for solutions that are actionable. Your attribution should directly feed into and optimise your marketing activity, and not be used simply for standalone reporting."

Will Edwards, Head of Measurement and Attribution – UK, Google

"Ensure you're tagging up different user 'events' correctly, as this will enable audience and segment retargeting at a later date in the campaign for the loyalty and engagement part of the campaign."

Natasha Osei-Prempeh, Partnerships Executive, Somo

"While digital ad spend burgeons, an estimated 80% of purchases are still made in physical stores. Online to offline attribution isn't simple, but human behaviour isn't simple – and is certainly not limited to clicks. Mobile's interminable connectivity and the billions of daily active and passive network events provide unparalleled insight into consumer behaviour, offering an end to end view of campaign performance by linking the online and offline worlds."

Timothea Horwell, Marketing & Research Manager, Weve

"Mobile attribution is important because of the very nature of mobile, that it is an always on device. We are constantly being touched by advertising content but may wait to purchase on our desktop as its a larger surface to review and complete the purchase, and as such should be given credit."

Joy Dean, Partnerships Director, UK & Europe, Widespace

With thanks to everyone who contributed...



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