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HIGHER MEDIA VALUE

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Top 10

questions advertisers can ask their agencies to

reduce media wastage

Media wastage isn't limited to obvious issues such as fraud or poor-quality inventory. It also includes excessive frequency, inefficient supply chains and even buying decisions that don't fully support the advertiser's business objectives. However, not all spend that doesn't reach working media is 'waste'; agency expertise, technology and measurement all play an important role in delivering effective campaigns; the challenge is understanding where investment creates value, and where value is lost.

Reducing media wastage is therefore not just about cutting costs, but ensuring that every pound invested delivers the highest possible media value. Before advertisers can assess whether their media investments are driving value, they need to define what good looks like, from the audiences they want to reach to the quality of media they expect to buy and the outcomes they want their investment to deliver.

Media agencies play a critical role in helping advertisers achieve those objectives. Asking agency partners the right questions gives advertisers a much clearer understanding of how their media investment is being managed, and creates the transparency needed to challenge decisions when needed and identify how media value can be improved.

Strategy and planning quality

1 Are we consistently buying media that aligns with our campaign objectives in terms of reach, frequency and targeting?

Even if a media strategy looks perfect on paper, it's rare that a campaign runs exactly as planned. As the campaign progresses, it's easy for delivery to drift from the original intent, for example by over-delivering against audiences that aren't the priority, or missing effective frequency levels. Advertisers should expect planning decisions to be clearly linked to campaign objectives and – just as importantly – be confident that those objectives are still being met once the campaign is live.

- **What to look for:** Clear evidence that delivery is tracked against agreed reach, frequency and audience targets, with adjustments made where performance drifts.

2 Are we actively optimising campaigns based on meaningful performance signals during delivery, or only assessing results after the campaign has ended?

Although campaigns are generally ultimately judged using outcomes such as sales or conversions, those metrics arrive too late to help steer a live campaign. Advertisers also need to know while the campaign is live whether delivery is aligned with the plan and objectives, how effectively it reaches the intended audience, and whether it is meeting quality standards. Without this insight and level of visibility, it can be easy to miss opportunities to optimise performance until it's too late to act.

- **What to look for:** Regular in-flight reporting that shows how campaigns are delivering against the plan, and clear examples of optimisation decisions taken while the activity is live.

Cost, benchmarking and media value

3 How does our media pricing compare to the market benchmark for like-for-like buys?

Without a clear benchmark, it is difficult to determine whether media is being bought efficiently. Pricing varies significantly across formats, markets and buying approaches, and headline CPMs and CPCs rarely tell the full story. Advertisers should expect a robust, like-for-like comparison against the market from their agency, taking into account all relevant cost drivers. This is essential to identify where value is being lost and where negotiation or reallocation opportunities exist.

- **What to look for:** Independent benchmarking of CPMs, CPCs or other buying metrics, adjusted for comparable audiences, formats, quality and buying conditions.

4 Where are we overpaying relative to the quality of media we are receiving?

Price is just one factor in understanding the value of a media investment – higher costs can be justified where quality is high, but issues arise when the price isn't aligned with the quality that the campaign delivers. Identifying where media is overpriced relative to its quality allows advertisers to challenge their agencies more effectively and redirect spend towards better-performing inventory.

- **What to look for:** Side-by-side reporting that compares cost and quality at placement or publisher level, highlighting where higher prices are not delivering stronger performance.

5 How much of our media investment reaches consumers, and what happens to the rest?

A significant share of media investment is spent long before an ad reaches its audience. Some of that 'non-working' spend is essential, covering areas such as agency expertise, technology and measurement. Some, however, isn't, reflecting inefficient supply chains, poor execution or other forms of avoidable waste. Understanding the difference between non-working spend that adds value and non-working spend that leads to avoidable waste is crucial, and helps advertisers focus on optimising the costs that add value, whilst reducing those that don't. Agencies should be able to provide a clear picture of where media investment goes, distinguishing between costs that add value and those that do not.

- **What to look for:** A clear breakdown of where budget goes, including fees, tech costs and supply chain elements, alongside visibility of what proportion is driving outcomes.

Media quality, delivery and measurement

6 Are we tracking the metrics that matter, or optimising towards the wrong outcomes?

How much media costs is important, but focusing on price alone can create a false sense of efficiency; low-cost media isn't necessarily the best value if it compromises quality or reaches the wrong audience. Before agencies can optimise price, advertisers must first define what good looks like for them by agreeing the quality measures that matter most to their business. Looking beyond CPMs and reach to include metrics such as attention, viewability, exposure length and formats helps advertisers understand how media quality is likely to influence marketing effectiveness.

Combining cost and quality metrics provides a more complete picture of campaign performance and reduces the risk of optimising towards the wrong outcomes. This is where a balanced measurement framework becomes important, as it helps both advertisers and their agencies to make decisions based on value, rather than cost alone.

- **What to look for:** Performance reporting that combines cost and quality metrics, rather than focusing on cost alone, and shows how both contribute to outcomes.

7 Where are we losing value due to poor-quality delivery or inefficient execution of our media plan?

Media wastage often hides in the gap between planned and actual delivery. Even the best media plan can lose effectiveness if it isn't executed as intended, whether that's through low-quality placements, uneven delivery or poor implementation. Identifying these gaps means looking closely at how campaigns were actually delivered in-market, compared with how they were planned. This is often where a surprising amount of media wastage can go unnoticed, and it gives advertisers the opportunity to challenge their agency on both the causes and the steps being taken to improve future campaign delivery.

- **What to look for:** Regular reporting that shows planned and actual delivery, with a clear explanation of any gaps, and evidence that corrective actions have been taken during the campaign.

Aligning incentives with media value

8 How well are our agency contracts, incentives and governance structures designed to drive media value rather than allow inefficiency or misalignment?

When agency contracts and incentive models don't create the right conditions for delivering media value, they can, unintentionally, contribute to inefficient spend and limit accountability. Agency decisions are influenced by a range of commercial and operational considerations, so contracts, incentives and governance should help ensure those decisions remain aligned with the client's objectives.

Given the pace of change in today's media landscape, it is crucial that advertisers maintain a clear, up-to-date understanding of how their agency team is structured and delivering services, including the agreed scope of work, team structure, the balance of central and local resources, hours allocated to the account, and the tools, including AI, used to support campaign delivery. Regular reviews of the agency contract and ways of working – ideally annually – will help advertisers retain clarity on their agency relationships and how they drive value for their business.

Done well, these arrangements encourage agencies to focus on delivering media value and achieving the advertiser's objectives, with success judged on outcomes rather than the volume of activity delivered.

- **What to look for:** Contracts and KPIs that are clearly linked to performance and value, with incentives that reward efficiency and measurable improvements rather than scale of spend.

9 How transparent are agency buying decisions, data and trading practices?

If your agency recommended one buying approach over another, could you explain why? If not, you may not have enough visibility into how decisions are made or how your media investment is managed. That includes understanding when agencies are recommending proprietary agency solutions or non-disclosed media, why they have been selected, and how they are expected to improve outcomes for the advertiser. Without access to underlying data or clarity around how decisions are made, it becomes harder to assess performance or challenge inefficiencies. Advertisers should expect their agency to be able to explain how media is bought, how budgets are allocated and why those decisions have been made. Without that transparency, it's difficult to challenge inefficiencies or identify opportunities to improve media value.

- **What to look for:** Access to underlying data, clarity on how buying decisions are made, and visibility into how budgets are allocated and executed.

10 What specific actions is our agency taking to reduce wastage and improve performance over time?

In many cases, areas of wastage are identified in a campaign, but not consistently addressed or followed up. Advertisers should have a clear view of the actions their agency is taking in response to performance insights, whether that's better planning, tighter execution or more efficient buying. Developing a consistent approach to continuous improvement with clear actions, ownership and regular review will help to ensure that learnings are not lost but acted upon, and that performance improves.

- **What to look for:** A documented set of actions following each campaign or reporting cycle, with clear ownership and evidence that changes have been implemented and tracked before the next campaign begins.

> Every campaign should provide both advertiser and agency with an opportunity to learn and improve. By asking the right questions, advertisers can gain a better understanding of how their media investment is being managed, identify where value is being lost, and work more effectively with their agencies to improve performance over time.

To discover how ISBA and ECI Media Management can help you to strengthen agency relationships and governance, reduce media wastage and maximise media value, contact one of our experts below.

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