

Top 10 ideas

**for more sustainable
media planning and buying**

Brands have long been investing in sustainability-related content, but recently the spotlight has fallen on the carbon footprint of the ads themselves. There is growing pressure for marketers to measure and indeed decrease the emissions produced by their ad campaigns. This isn't just a moral imperative; it's a commercial one too. More than three quarters of consumers say that, in five years' time, they will only want to spend money on brands that practise sustainable advertising; 42% state that they believe that brands should be transparent about the impact that their products and marketing activities have on the environment.

All forms of advertising have a carbon footprint, and while there is scope for making offline media investments such as OOH and print more sustainable, the real opportunity lies in online advertising. Not only is online attracting an ever-increasing proportion of ad dollars, but it also requires a huge amount of energy, with warehouses full of servers plugged into national grids. Every single impression served uses between 0.14Wh and 1.93Wh - that number becomes vast when you consider the number of impressions served each day around the world. Indeed, the energy required to power online advertising generates around 2% of the internet's total emissions. Internet emissions account for around 3% of total global emissions – on par with the entire aviation industry.

The key for marketers is to reduce excess digital activity, particularly wasted impressions. Luckily, this equates to not only a reduced carbon footprint, but also financial savings, meaning cutting emissions also drives higher media value.

Below are ECI Media Management's ten key pieces of advice for marketers seeking to reduce the environmental impact of their campaigns.

1. Avoid excessive frequency and optimize targeting

The key to greener media planning and buying is to reduce waste – because every wasted impression uses unnecessary energy. Focusing spend to avoid excessive frequency drives savings as well as cutting carbon emissions; using data-driven insights to identify your exact target audience and target them precisely with tailored messaging and creative achieves the same impact. Reducing the number of channels that you invest in and focusing only on the ones that truly capture the attention of your desired audience, is also a great way to deliver on value for your brand and for the planet.

2. Implement a relevant KPI framework

The key to successful media planning is to implement an efficient process: a framework with well-defined KPIs ensures that all parties are aligned and focused on the same business and sustainability goals. This alignment is the best way to avoid waste – and that is the best way to drive higher media value and reduce carbon emissions.

3. Refine supply paths and simplify tech stacks

Every step of any supply chain increases activity and therefore carbon emissions, and the same is true for online advertising. Each surplus supplier removed from the chain between a brand and its publishers will decrease a campaign's carbon footprint, especially when it comes to reducing duplicative auction activity. The even better news? It's good for your budget too.

Simplifying your tech stack will reduce the number of layers between creating and delivering an ad and will reduce the volume of indirect emissions driven by your campaigns, as well as making your buying process more transparent and easier to manage. Many brands will undoubtedly already be auditing their tech stacks with the imminent demise of the third-party cookie.

4. Optimize creative

It's not just where and how you place an ad that can impact on its footprint: the ad and the message itself also have an effect. They can be optimized to reduce data usage, for example by using smaller file sizes to reduce the energy required to load them. Highly impactful, data-driven messaging that drives higher attention will also reduce the number of impressions needed and therefore the amount of energy required.

5. Consider the impact of programmatic

It is estimated that programmatic advertising drives 215,000 metric tonnes of CO₂ per month across Australia, France, the UK, Germany and the US. The difference in how they approach programmatic buying is a key factor in publishers' different carbon footprints; so buying direct from publishers that limit the number of ad slots on a page and primarily sell ads direct to the advertiser will have a significant impact on carbon emissions. Reducing reliance on programmatic buying may help brands to avoid 'made-for-advertising' sites that have high ad refresh rates and limited reach, therefore generating unnecessary carbon emissions. Inclusion lists which are vetted for reach and sustainability will guide brands more seamlessly to more sustainable campaigns.

6. Explore working with partners who offer greener ad tech

Although simplifying the tech stack is a practical and important measure to take in reducing your brand's carbon footprint, there are an increasing number of suppliers who offer green ad tech solutions – a phenomenon known as the 'greenscape'. These companies are innovating across the media investment process, from minimizing the amount of surplus data downloaded and targeting lower-carbon inventory, to measuring how much carbon or other greenhouse gases are produced by a campaign. Partnering with these and similar platforms that have a focus on sustainability will help brands work towards becoming carbon neutral.

7. Reduce the impact of offline media as well

It's not just online media activity that can be optimized to reduce its impact on the environment. There's also scope for scrutinizing the impact of offline spend, particularly for OOH. Energy consumption is one area for consideration: using solar panels for lighting and to power screens, switching screens off at night, and using LED lights, for example. Another is the materials used – inks and vinyl can have a heavy impact on the planet, so recycling old materials and investing into research to find better ones are good options to lessen the impact of your OOH campaigns. There are even initiatives like 'living' OOH which turns bus shelters, for example, into mini-gardens that encourage biodiversity – and capture the attention of consumers. DOOH also reduces fuel emissions and the need for physical materials, but it comes with similar issues to other online advertising formats.

Print is another area in which a focus on materials and processes can reduce the carbon footprint of a campaign. Choosing publishers who use recycled or FSC-certified paper, soy-based inks and minimize their use of toxic chemicals and packaging is a great place to start.

8. Contribute to industry conversations and initiatives

Over the last five years, the global advertising industry has really woken up to the climate crisis and its own ability and responsibility to do something about it. Brands, agencies, industry bodies and other players are collaborating at a national and international level to make meaningful change. Ad Net Zero is active in the UK, Ireland, the US and New Zealand with a mission to support the ad industry deliver on its 'full potential to support businesses and people to deal with the climate emergency and build a more sustainable future', while the sustainability focus area of the ANA's Growth Agenda provides marketers with resources, tools, content and inspiration to drive more sustainable media and marketing activity. Others are exploring how the industry can create reporting standards that allow effective measurement, understanding and comparison of the impact of campaigns. Contributing to these initiatives is an exciting way to drive meaningful change and make a mark on behalf of your brand.

9. Beware the footprint of AI

Artificial intelligence is set to revolutionize the advertising industry, allowing marketers to automate much of their activity and achieve the holy grail of automation and personalization. It's exciting, but it also comes with risks, not least its impact on the environment. AI uses more energy than other forms of computing – training just one model can use more electricity than 100 US homes consume in a year and generates the same carbon emissions as 110 US cars emit in a year. And that doesn't include the impact of billions of requests asking AI to perform tasks. Using AI with caution and consideration will benefit not only the planet but advertising outcomes too.

10. Expand the definition of responsible advertising

Sustainability is just one (very important) facet of responsible advertising. Consumers expect the brands they buy from to be a force for good in the world, and that includes fostering diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). While this is normally a subject of marketing activity, rather than a method, DEI in media planning and buying is becoming more prominent and visible. Marketers can consider how to be inclusive in their audience planning, support minority-owned media, brand safety, encouraging positive behaviors in consumers, and how best to reflect how they are performing in these areas. Actions that are truly a force for good encourage positive sentiment as well as supporting the planet – but ensure they are meaningful and authentic, as consumers are wise to ‘greenwashing’. Finally, give careful thought to the companies with which your brand works at all levels of the supply chain – favoring those who share your commitment to sustainability will encourage eco-friendly behaviors across the ecosystem.

As is so often the case with modern advertising, navigating this new ‘greenscape’ can be challenging for marketers who already have a lot on their plates. Independent auditors such as ECI Media Management can provide guidance, signposting effective solutions and suggesting effective KPI and measurement frameworks. Our senior management team is always happy to have a discussion – their contact details can be found at the end of this document.



About ECI Media Management

ECI Media Management: Higher Media Value

Technology is transforming the media landscape at an unprecedented pace. But in the right hands, change can be a force for good. ECI, the market's fastest growing global media management company, leverages these changes to help you drive **higher media value** from your advertising investment.

A modern, forensic approach

Ever since our formation we have championed a modern approach to media and financial auditing. As pioneers in the field of digital auditing, we include sophisticated analysis of programmatic activity in our audit model, and we pride ourselves on a forensic, fact-based approach which harnesses the power of our world-class talent and proprietary technology. Along with our innovative benchmarking capabilities, we are confident in our ability to empower our clients to drive **higher media value** and media-led impact on business performance.

We can measure a very high proportion of media activity, allowing for a more accurate

understanding of the efficacy of investments and better optimization for future activity.

Cutting-edge services

Capitalizing on today's dynamic, fast-paced media landscape to drive **higher media value** requires data-driven decision-making, global experience and a deep understanding of the latest technologies. At ECI Media Management we are proud to be able to offer these and so much more, including TV auditing, financial compliance auditing, pitch management, KPI-setting and management and contract consultancy.

Global experience, local expertise

We are proud of our client portfolio, which contains some of the world's largest and leading advertisers. Our network of owned offices and leading affiliates supports them where they need us, across the Americas, Europe and Asia Pacific. We offer them high-level media intelligence and rigorous benchmarking and, ultimately, the insight, experience and savvy to ensure that their advertising investment and agency relationships drive **higher media value**.

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