

Is Attribution Growing Up?



it's like a pimply-faced teenager showing signs of what it's going to be when it grows up ... every once in a while!

Attribution has evolved from its early days as a digital last click phenomenon. It's no longer the gurgling new baby, or the eager kid waiting at the bus stop. Attribution has moved into adolescence.

Like teenagers, however, it's prone to hormonal imbalances, volatility, unnecessary risk-taking and moodiness. Metaphorically speaking, of course.

Parents of teens know you've got to keep your cool, not over-react to provocations and maintain a sense of humor. And never give teens the keys to the BMW!

The same holds true for the media world. In nurturing attribution on its path to full maturity, the industry has accepted the technique generally without judgment, carefully evaluating but never thwarting its development, and generally improved its confidence and self-esteem. A case of good parenting!

Obvious signs that attribution has matured include ...

1. Today, other media, like television, radio and outdoor can be measured similarly to digital
2. Users now acknowledge the need for incrementality
3. Better statistical methodologies trump last click
4. Attribution is close to delivering on the promise of real-time optimization. (or at least near real-time.)

That's coming a long way from a few short years ago.

A full day immersion into the state of marketing analytics at Sequent Partners and Greenbook's October 17th **2019 Attribution Accelerator** revealed even more ways attribution has matured.

Signs Attribution is **growing up**:

1. For the first time, marketers genuinely acknowledged the importance of balancing long-term and short-term efforts and seek ways to manage both simultaneously.
2. They appear no longer willing to accept the trade-off in immediate sales at the risk of brand growth. This suggests that the ability to measure the power of the brand but it is not yet available. Reflecting the power of brands (and anything beyond immediate effects) is clearly cued up for the next development sprint.
3. Attribution specialists now move seamlessly through holistic measures of performance like marketing mix models, tactical evaluation from

multi-touch attribution and testing in the quest for strategic and tactical guidance. The tools are no longer at odds; there are no longer distinct camps. For the first time, perhaps, we heard a deeper appreciation of how each tool adds value, depending on the objective.

4. The recognition that aggregated marketing mix a modeling still has a role to play in media analytics is undoubtedly driven by increased awareness of privacy legislation. There's a very valid question whether attribution will be reliable once household-level or device-level data must depend on the generosity of all consumers opting in.
5. The bite of criticism and frustration seems to have dulled as attribution matures. Facebook, for instance, doesn't seem to be the big bad wolf it was in years past. Though there are the inherent frustrations with the walled gardens, in 2019, the industry appears more accepting of the situation and more willing to work within the constraints Facebook and Google have set. They are past the sting and mature acceptance has settled in over the industry.

And clearly attribution is evolving and glimpses of what it might become in adulthood are emerging. We have gotten to the point where attribution can be trusted a bit ... somewhat trusted ... enough to drive the family's Civic, maybe, but not dad's BMW.

Yes, significant signs of attribution's *immaturity* remain:

1. The impact of creative messaging is absent in evaluation of advertising performance despite ample evidence that it is the single most important variable impacting ROI.
2. Offline and online outcomes are still a challenge to integrate, and currently exist in two entirely separate ecosystems.
3. Cross-channel attribution continues to vex the industry, dampening the ability to reap attribution's greatest benefit – assessing the impact of each media touchpoint across the consumer journey.

4. And finally, there's a considerable amount of cobbling data and solutions together, which leads to untold bias and weaknesses.

But it's safe to say media industry leaders are doing a strong job guiding and nurturing attribution. The four segments at the 2019 Attribution Accelerator were chaired by industry leaders representing ARF, 4As, CIMM and McKinsey. They haven't lost patience with the challenges or with the pace of enhancements. They've embraced the opportunities presented by the tool and seem to bring the right mix of tolerance and impatience to helping attribution evolve.



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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alice H. S. Funt", is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.