

So, you
think you
might be a
#Clickhead?



Six signs that you could be slipping back into bad habits when it comes to digital advertising measurement, and what you can do to avoid being a #Clickhead

Measurement in digital advertising is tricky at the best of times. It can often feel like a weight hanging over a campaign and there is the ever-present urge to revert to click-through rates – short-term vanity metrics that keep things simple but will only tell you a small part of the story.

Marketers who love click-through rates and reject more nuanced, sophisticated techniques for measuring their campaigns are called Clickheads.

When you look in the mirror each morning, you might wonder whether that's a #Clickhead looking back at you. If that's the case, keep reading.

In this booklet, we've identified six behaviours and biases that are signs of a Clickhead, along with some easy next steps for what to do if you think this could be you.

Ambiguity & uncertainty

Our brains are constantly calculating the rewards we'll see as an outcome of our decisions. Under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity, risk feels amplified and we go out of our way to opt for outcomes that are known and perceived as safe.

What does this mean for online measurement? Nobody can deny that, as a marketer, you are currently navigating a lot of change – from online privacy and the deprecation of cookies to the cost-of-living crisis. In this context of uncertainty, your brain is programmed to revert to “safe behaviours” (such as click-through rates) and stop recognising the rewards of longer-term measurement solutions. In short, the urge to be a clickhead is harder to resist.



Familiarity bias

In this context, it's normal to develop a preference for things merely because we are familiar with them. Familiarity bias means that we associate what is known to us with a general sense of comfort, while fearing and rejecting what is new.

As an advertiser, click-through rates are probably your most familiar tool for measurement. Even if you're aware of their drawbacks, the attraction of click-through rates will persist because they're known.

You may also feel a heightened fear of regret when it comes to alternative measurement techniques like attribution, econometrics or brand studies. That's natural but – by being aware of it - you can overcome that fear.

Default bias

Stress compounds the problem. It's human nature to want to keep things as they are unless the incentive to change is sufficiently compelling – especially during stressful times. Stress drains our energy and it can feel much more comfortable to slip back into old habits.

What might this mean for click-through rates? Well, clicks are strongly engrained in the methodology of digital advertising – they basically are the status quo. We accept them even if we know they are not the most effective route.

In a difficult economic climate, it's easy to understand why you are more likely to gravitate towards this. Uncertainty causes stress, releasing a surge in hormones that increases activity in our habit-related brain systems. To save cognitive resources, a stressed brain goes into 'survival mode' and prioritises the default option over deliberate action. And, before you know it, you're scrolling through the 'click-through rate' column on your report.

Cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is conflict that occurs when there is a mismatch between your beliefs and your actions. To resolve this discomfort, you'll usually attempt to align your beliefs with your actions – but not always successfully.

In measurement terms, you probably know that click-through rates aren't the most advanced way of measuring the effectiveness of digital advertising, even if your actions perhaps don't reflect this. By being aware of this disconnect and the discomfort it's causing you, you'll be more motivated to align your actions with your belief that click-through rates aren't cutting the mustard.



Confirmation bias

As much as we might instinctively deny it, this is one we all do, all the time. Confirmation bias is our tendency to favour information that supports our pre-existing beliefs or expectations, while undervaluing and rejecting evidence that disproves our beliefs. So, if you work with colleagues and agencies who also believe click-through rates are a valid, reliable measure, you will feel reaffirmed in your belief that they are the right metric to use.

Confirmation bias is closely linked to anchoring bias. As an advertiser, you'll often be under pressure to evaluate the success of digital advertising to benchmarks from previous campaigns. In the looming recession, increased pressure to justify media investment is likely to result in you seeking out evidence that favours what you think you know – that clicks are good.

Simplicity bias

The last sign that you might be at risk of becoming a #Clickhead is the simplest, literally. As a human, you'll follow the path of least resistance and prefer options that require low cognitive or behavioural effort. For example, when shopping, you are more likely to buy a product that is easier to reach, and you are willing to pay more for uncomplicated experiences.

This is a common issue when it comes to measurement. Click-through rates provide instant gratification and simple conclusions, without the more complex context of how someone has experienced your ad. Naturally, that's a very attractive prospect and can make it difficult to consider other alternatives.

If your job becomes more stressful, other tasks will demand more cognitive energy and you'll rely more on mental shortcuts. But just because you're stressed and dealing with uncertainty, it doesn't mean you have to accept the simplest option.

What to do next?

Chances are that at least some of this resonates with you and you've noticed some of your own behaviours here. That's totally natural. But by reading this pamphlet and accepting that you might be becoming a #Clickhead, you've taken an important first step towards better measurement.

Here's what to do next:

1. **Speak to your agency about measuring better.** Chances are, they're experiencing many of the same behaviours as you but, with a bit of guidance, they'll be able to make sure you measure beyond clicks
2. **Familiarise yourself with IAB UK's Measurement Toolkit.** It offers a raft of more effective ways to measure your campaigns, and while you don't need to become an econometrics expert by this time next week, it will arm you with some valuable knowledge for that conversation with your agency, or with your boss, or your finance director.

Good luck! The IAB is always here to support industry Clickheads. While cases have been drastically reducing over the past five years, a tougher economic climate will almost certainly see a tendency towards clicks increase. The first step is acknowledging that you might be a Clickhead. After that, the world is your measurement oyster!

Head to iabuk.com/measurement for more advice