

Trends in ad ops and ad tech

By [Piliira Mwambala](#)

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Ad operations professionals working inside ad agencies, online publishers' trading desks, demand-side platforms, ad exchanges, media sales houses and brand organisations are now under immense pressure to upskill and provide data driven insights from online campaign executions.



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More people are going online, increased device penetration is enabling people to go online, the internet is getting faster, mobile data is getting cheaper around the world (not in South Africa), and brands have found additional channels to reach online consumers.

With this rapid increase of ad platforms ad channels, ad formats, ad units, ad metrics and ad technology, it's imperative for ad ops professionals to quickly evolve and remain up to date with these rapid and constant changes in the Ad marketplace.

Ad ops in ad tech

Ad operations has always been the engine room of online advertising. Traditionally, ad operations were mere executioners of campaigns and the client facing was tasked to sales and account managers who liaised with brand strategists and media planners/buyers.

Nowadays, ad ops roles require customer facing. This is because as ad tech is evolving, it's the responsibility of ad ops to understand how ad tech works with each brand and using that insight and experience, they're able to play an advisory role to brand strategists in terms of which channels are key for certain brands using key audience data that's available on those channels.

Ad ops is now in the frontline to ensure brand success and just no longer campaign success.

Ad tech trends and developments

I've been keeping a close eye on which direction ad tech is heading in 2018 and I'd like to highlight these six developments that the industry needs to keep a pulse on:

1. **Measurability:** "If you can't measure it, you can't improve it, and if you can't improve it, you're losing money". Famous words which resonate in digital media. An investment in data driven personnel and tools help brand managers to make real-time key decision.
2. **RTB Video:** Video has always been a big deal in advertising. TV budgets are always massive. Demand side platforms make it cheaper for brands to scale up their advertising. Reaching online users via video messaging is on the rise. Sometimes banners just don't relay a brand's message accurately as a compared to video.
3. **Data:** Whether first party, second party or third party, ad ops professionals who make use of data continue to see better campaign results. Efficiency and speed are key to avoiding wastage when online bidding transactions are taking place in as fast as 200–300 milliseconds.
4. **Attribution and analytics:** Analytics helps track and report for site and app traffic efficiencies. Analytics also helps in measuring ROI. Attribution helps to point out the inefficiencies in a funnel, assisting in removing wastage. An abundance of free tools helps in measuring both digital and offline data and gaining customer insights.
5. **Cross-screen ads:** As mentioned above, there's now an increase in devices, which means varied screen sizes and resolutions. Clever marketers know that this doesn't translate to demanding for every creative format from ad creators. IAB released an [Ad Portfolio](#) that features ads that allow for adjustments to a variety of screen sizes.
6. **Expertise:** "Rome wasn't built in a day". Brands and marketers are more than ever taking online advertising tasks in-house. Programmatic media trading, social media buying, Google PPC and search ads executions are slowly being done by brands themselves. I believe that if issues of lack of trust, non-transparent fee structures and hidden costs of media are addressed, brands and advertisers will better leverage on experience and expertise of certain key businesses and forge long term healthy relationships that assist their brands in clever decision making.

Ad ops skills shortage

I've highlighted how much money is being invested in digital media, both from a [local](#) perspective and [internationally](#). Digital advertising is big business and it's here to stay. However, there's a skills shortage for Ad Ops professionals both globally and locally. Brands and Advertisers are spending billions of Rands into the actual ad content and the ad tech, but not much investment is being done in areas of training the personnel who use these ad technologies in the engine rooms.

The challenge here is that ad operations is such a niche area within the online advertising ecosystem and the upskilling and educating currently rests with ad tech and media trading companies which build the tech (DoubleClick, AppNexus, Facebook, Google, Twitter).

This however doesn't address career development for ad ops personnel outside these organisations. Ad ops careers being in reporting and campaign management then after platform training and 2-3 years' experience, people move into other roles within the ecosystem.

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