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Magid M. Abraham, President & CEO
comScore, Inc.
11465 Sunset Hills Road
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William Pulver, President & CEO
Nielsen//NetRatings
120 West 45th St., 35th Fl.
New York, NY 10036

Dear Dr. Abraham and Mr. Pulver:

On behalf of the Interactive Advertising Bureau, I would like to invite you to a summit meeting with the IAB's Board of Directors on interactive audience measurement. We haven't scheduled this meeting; we are willing to hold it at any time and any place that is convenient for you both. But we would like to convene it as soon as possible, because the matter is urgent: the ability of digital media – which is to say *all* media – to achieve our customers' goal of true accountability.

At this summit – if not before -- we are seeking your agreement to a near-term timetable for independent audits and accreditations of your companies' interactive-audience measurement processes. We also hope to open a dialogue with you about assuring the integrity of audience measurement systems and processes as interactive technologies continue to evolve.

In taking leadership of the IAB after seven years at a global management consulting firm, I wasn't surprised to learn that some of the issues I once covered as a media and marketing reporter still are front-and-center for our extended industry. Buyers, sellers, intermediaries and service providers always will debate why people buy, what engages them and how, and the power of brand versus price, among other topics. But I was rather startled to discover that one issue the Internet was built to resolve remains a burning platform, 70 years after marketers and media companies first lit the match. That issue is audience measurement.

The promise of the Internet has always been its ability to tell, to a high degree of certitude, how many people are coming to, perusing, and engaging with a media outlet. After decades of media research methodologies premised on early 20th century innovations in statistical sampling of barley yields, we could at last move beyond projections, and into a census-based universe that would let marketers eliminate waste, media companies realize a fair price, and advertising agencies target audiences and analyze their campaigns more effectively.

To be sure, sample-based research built the media industry as we know it. Our great broadcasters, magazine companies, and newspapers, as well as the giant consumer brands that depended on them to reach audiences, derived from the small panels of Americans who allowed their TV sets to be wired, filled in diaries, or sent prepaid postcards listing their preferences back to the research firms in the Princeton-New York corridor. But an exact count – that was marketing’s Holy Grail, and the Internet put it within reach. If you’ll forgive me the transgression of quoting myself, I noted the potential in a 1998 Wired magazine article: “The new media technologies, by drastically reducing production and distribution costs and making possible almost continual and instantaneous refinements in message, promise to increase the efficiency of accountable advertising so that its widespread adoption, not as an ancillary medium but as the primary communications choice, becomes inescapable... The spurious distinction between image advertising and retail advertising will erode, then disappear, as each advertisement, every product placement, all editorial can be tied to transactions.”

Imagine my surprise when I came to the IAB and discovered that the main audience measurement companies are still relying on panels – a media-measurement technique invented for the radio industry exactly seven decades ago– to quantify the Internet.

As the son of a lifelong researcher (a former head of the New York chapter of the American Marketing Association), I am sophisticated enough to know that panel methodologies will remain important. Still, it is incumbent on all of us in the marketing-media value chain to come as close as we can to the ideal of true accountability. To continue to close the gap between sample and census requires dialogue, collaboration, and auditing according to a set of independent, transparent standards.

By reaching for the goal of true accountability, we can help marketers unlock their own growth potential. The era of mass media (and mass-media measurement methodologies) excluded populations that appeared too difficult to reach, or too cost-ineffective for main media to count -- hence, the battles that have waged for years between media and research companies over the dilemma of counting college students, men in bars, out-of-home Mom’s, ethnic minorities, or adults at work. The glory of interactive media is they make it easy to assemble, count, and assess the marketing value of these and myriad other niche populations – and aggregate these niche populations into effective and efficient media plans. To persist in using panels that undercount or ignore the diverse populations that *are* the future of consumer marketing is to deny marketers the insights they need to build their businesses. And it certainly appears to us as if they are being undercounted or disregarded, for our members’ server logs continue to diverge starkly from your companies’ sample-based assessments, by 2x to 3x magnitudes in some cases – far beyond any legitimate margin of sampling error.

We in the marketing-media ecosystem have spent too many years trying to clean up the residue of flawed media-research methodologies. We simply cannot let the Internet, the most accountable medium ever invented, fall into the same bad customs that have hindered older media and angered advertisers for decades – customs such as inadequate samples, accepted out of begrudging convenience; or phantom metrics, like "pass-along readers," that add shadowy bulk to audiences that cannot be measured directly; or metering technologies and processes that are easy to game.

The media companies that comprise the IAB represent some 86% of all interactive advertising spend in the United States. We are a diverse group -- portals and branded publishers, ad-networks and games-networks, mobile specialists and blogs, newspaper-founded companies and television-founded companies -- but we have in common a commitment to accountability and transparency. Discrepancies as wide as the ones we are seeing are unacceptable to us, and they should be unacceptable to you and your teams.

The IAB is not asking that you accept our members' exact counts. Rather, we want your companies to participate in an open process aimed at creating – forgive the mixed metaphor – a solid and transparent foundation for audience measurement in the 21st Century. So committed is the IAB to the establishment of fact-based interactive-media accountability that we have delegated oversight of interactive media metrics to the one independent body chartered by the U.S. Congress to steward media measurement: The Media Rating Council.

As you know, the MRC was established by Congress in the early 1960s to oversee the establishment and administration of minimum standards for rating operations; the accreditation of rating services on the basis of information submitted by such services; and auditing, through independent CPA firms, of the activities of the rating services. With the MRC, the Interactive Advertising Bureau has developed guidelines for counting ad impressions. Together, we also have developed procedures for the auditing of advertising technologies and processes used by interactive media companies, agencies and third parties. Many of the largest marketers in the United States – including BMW, Colgate-Palmolive, Ford Motor Company, HP, ING, Kimberly-Clark, Pepsi and Visa – have said they will require the interactive media companies on which they advertise to provide audited numbers in 2007, and certified numbers in 2008.

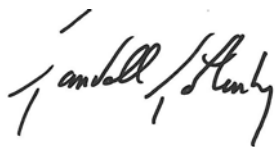
The IAB believes this request for trustworthy metrics is good for the entire marketing-media value chain. To this end, we have asked several times for comScore and Nielsen//NetRatings to agree to audits of your audience measurement processes. Both your companies' reports have a material impact on interactive marketing and media decision-making; transparency into your methodologies is critical to maintaining advertisers' confidence in interactive media, particularly now, as marketers allocate more budget to interactive venues. Every major advertising medium receives audited numbers from its key measurement suppliers – but not interactive. Although I understand you have agreed to be audited, I'm not aware that any timetables have been set. The platform is still burning.

You can help us put out that fire. I know from my work at Booz Allen Hamilton, which included three years of research in collaboration with the Association of National Advertisers, that senior marketers are now not just paying deep attention to interactive media, but are poised to allocate significant budgets to interactive marketing campaigns. They are attracted by the deep engagement interactive media provide, and the true accountability we can offer. But these same senior marketers will look with disdain at any effort to subvert that promise. Your own growth, as well as that of our member media companies, our agency partners, and the marketers we serve, will depend on providing fact-based audience measurement.

So please join the IAB's Board, the MRC, and other representatives of the marketing, media and advertising industries whom we might collectively engage, in a summit meeting on audience measurement. All we ask for is a timetable by which your companies and ours can create the audience measurement infrastructure the marketplace is now demanding.

As do you, I revere the researchers who helped create the modern marketing and media industries, many of whom I had the pleasure to meet, and even befriend – people like Frank Stanton and Leo Bogart. Let us honor their memories by building the accountable media measurement system for which they strove.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randall Rothenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

Randall Rothenberg
President & CEO

cc: O. Burtch Drake, President & CEO, American Association of Advertising Agencies
George Ivie, Executive Director & CEO, Media Ratings Council
Robert Liodice, President & CEO, Association of National Advertisers