Podcast Measurement Compliance Certification

Measurement Guidelines Compliance Certification Guide

Version 2.2 | October 2022

Executive Summary

The Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines are the result of the Podcast Technical Working Group's efforts to provide clarity in the marketplace by developing a common language around measurement. The document provides an introduction to tracking ad delivery in a podcast and attempts to provide clarity in the marketplace by describing best practices for measuring downloads, audience size, and ad delivery.

Podcasts are downloaded to a device for later listening or through progressive download listening. In most cases, the podcast file and any ads included with it are downloaded to a device that doesn't, or can't, send data about the consumption of the podcast and ads. This lack of data beyond ad delivery limits real-time measurement.

Because the medium, distribution, and platforms used to collect and listen to podcasts are built around the habit of downloading the file tracking content in this time-shifted medium involves filtering server logs to produce meaningful data for measurement. Since podcast technical teams analyze server logs differently, results vary across the industry.

The guidelines were created to list out the most important areas that cause divergence, and to provide direction or a baseline that everyone starts from. This list includes basic concepts like ad metric definitions, file size thresholds, consistently eliminating bots & pre-load requests and ensuring that ID3 headers are factored in when counting partial downloads. Also included are more complicated topics like time window sizes and other recommendations to filter out duplicate requests.

The working group recognized that while individual implementations will still be different, there is value in having guidelines, and a certification process that would test and validate the implementations to check whether they are following the baseline defined in the guidelines. The certification program outlined in this document is voluntary and serves to ensure that your implementation is compatible with the Podcast Measurement Guidelines.

This guide describes the requirements and process of the Podcast Technical Measurement Guidelines Compliance Certification

The Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines are developed and managed by the [Podcast Technical Working Group](#)

Change Log

Revision	Description	Author	Date
Version 1.0	Document created, First draft for GA Release	Amit Shetty (amit@iabtechlab.com)	9/6/2016
Version 2.0	Improved content metrics definitions, introduces improved process for accurately capturing metrics	Amit Shetty (amit@iabtechlab.com)	12/20/2017
Version 2.1 initial draft	Added guidance for user agent structure, IPv6 recommendations, additional podcast player recommendations	Mike Midden (mike@iabtechlab.com)	11/2/2020
Version 2.1 updated	Language edits such as typo corrections and replacement of whitelist/blacklist terminology. Updated data for the Podcast Player Market Share section. Improved IPv6 metric calculation methodology.	Mike Midden (mike@iabtechlab.com)	1/11/2021
Version 2.1 updated	Updated for yearly cadence. Minor cleanup	Jarrett Wold (jarrett@iabtechlab.com)	10/11/2022

Certification Process

The Podcast Measurement Guidelines Compliance program is voluntary and certifies an organization's (Company) adherence to the IAB Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines which is done through an in-depth multistep audit of individual implementations. The IAB Tech Lab engages third party auditors for this compliance program and the process is an iterative one, meaning it is generally not a pass or fail. We work with you to perform a review against the requirements, identify gaps, fix them, and move forward. This takes about 60 days.

The certification involves the following process:

- **Kickoff Call:** It starts with a kickoff call where a certification checklist is provided to the company getting certified. This checklist is based on the guidelines and is a list of all the areas of concern and directions described in the guidelines. The auditors will review the checklist, and have a discussion with the company about their platform's architecture. The goal is to identify the next steps and also identify potential areas of concern for their implementation early on.

- **Company Response:** Next, the company is given time to respond to the checklist in detail. They are required to provide responses to each Podcast Metric and what their implementation does for that area.

- **Auditor Review:** The auditors use these responses to go into an in-depth review of the technical architecture and operational processes followed by the podcast company.
  - This is the bulk of the certification process and is an iterative process that includes a mix of code reviews, test runs and interviews, meant to validate the auditor's understanding of the implementation as well as to identify any potential issues. If any issues are identified, the company is given the opportunity to fix the issues on their platform and re-test.

- ○ The goal is to provide every opportunity for the company to get aligned with the guidelines and reach certification successfully, which is the reason they do it in iterations.

- ● **Closing:** Once the auditors and the company being certified agree that there are no more issues open that the company intends to address, the certification is considered completed.
    - ○ The certified companies get a seal of compliance that they can post on their website, and they also get listed on our website at - https://iabtechlab.com/compliance-programs/compliant-companies/
    - ○ We also publish a public report documenting each of the guidelines and mark which ones you support or not.

Application

To apply for certification, an organization must have implemented the Podcast Measurement Guidelines in their platform. If the organization is ready to begin the process or for general inquiries, they may email compliance@iabtechlab.com.

Certification Fees

As of October 2022, there is an annual fee that covers the compliance audit process and will be tied to the most recent version of the Podcast Measurement Guidelines. You can check for pricing specifics for your organization by reaching out to compliance@iabtechlab.com.

Qualification

Any podcast platform that uses or distributes server-side measurement reporting (*i.e. downloads, listeners, ad plays, and ad delivery*) is eligible to apply for compliance. It is not required to be an IAB Tech Lab member to become an integration partner.

Geographic Applicability of Certification

Podcast Measurement Guideline certification is a global program and applies to all geographic regions.

Certification Testing

An IAB Tech Lab approved independent third party auditing firm is employed to perform the validation of a company's platform for compliance with the Podcast Measurement Guidelines.

The scope of validation testing covers the following:

1. **Platform Overview:**
   - Review of the overall system architecture of the platform.
   - Review of the company org structure as relates to online ad delivery.
   - Walkthrough of advertiser, campaign, and insertion setup process.
   - Review of publisher (inventory) application, approval and set-up process, if applicable.
   - Log file collection, data validation and aggregation processes and controls.

2. **Filtering:**
   - Eliminate Pre-Load Requests (at least one of two solutions).
     - Policy put in place to not allow pre-loading in players and on websites (e.g. preload=none for HTML5).
     - Use a download threshold based on ID3 header payload plus 1 minute of recording time to determine if the request was for a play/download or for pre-loading.

- ○ Eliminate Potential Bots and Bogus Requests.

    - ■ IP threat filtering

    - ■ Domain threat filtering

    - ■ User Agent filtering

    - ■ Apple 2 byte range filtering

    - ■ Automatically triggered downloads (i.e. Apple Watch OS)

- ○ Handling HTTP Requests.

    - ■ HEAD requests - these should not be counted because this is typically used to check for changes because no data is transferred in a HEAD request.

    - ■ GET requests:

        - ● 200 (ok request) should be counted

        - ● 206 (partial request) A partial request should only be counted if the download covers the 1-minute rule, and de-duplication based on IP Address/UA is being done to cover cases where the user might be skipping ahead. Determining whether the requests cover the 1-minute requirement might require reassembling of the requests.

        - ● 304 (not modified request) -> signal that user has existing file and wants to see if it changed.

3. **Apply File Threshold Levels**

    - ○ To count as a valid download, the ID3 tag plus enough of the podcast content to play for 1 minute should have been downloaded.

    - ○ If the podcast is too small or if it isn't possible to compute the file and ID3 sizes regularly, complete file downloads (100% of the file, including the ID3 tag) should be used.

4. **Identify and Aggregate Uniques:**

    - ○ Identifying Uniques for Downloads & Users (*the details of the filtering methods should be kept transparent*):

- Filtering using IP address + User Agent — *The following method is recommended.*
  - A combination of IP Address and UA is used to identify unique users and downloads. For example, if the same file is downloaded 10 times by 6 user agents behind one IP address, that would count as 6 users and 6 downloads.
- Other methods may be used to identify unique users. Alternate methodologies must be reviewed and approved.
  - Play-Pause-Play Scenarios
    - If a unique download is divided into multiple file requests, for example if a user plays the first half of an episode using a website audio player, clicks pause, and then resumes a half-hour later, then that should still be counted as one unique download. Care should be taken to not count these as multiple downloads/users.

5. **Generate Metrics :**
   - Podcast Content Metric Definitions
     - Download: A unique file request that was downloaded. This includes complete file downloads as well as partial downloads in accordance with the rules described earlier
     - Listener: data that represents a single user who downloads content (for immediate or delayed consumption). Listeners may be represented by a combination of IP address and User Agent as described earlier. The listeners must be specified within a stated time frame (day, week, month, etc.).
   - Podcast Ad Metric Definitions
     - Ad Delivered: an ad that was delivered as determined by server logs that show either all bytes of the ad file were sent or the bytes representing the portion of the podcast file containing the ad file was downloaded.

- ■ Client-Confirmed Ad Play: counts an ad that was able to prompt a tracking beacon from the client when the file was played. Whenever possible, the metric should include information about how much of the ad was played using the markers: ad start, first quartile (25%), midpoint (50%), third quartile (75%), and complete (100%).
  - ○ High Level Metrics
    - ■ The Content and Ad metrics described above should also be made available at 3 levels – publisher / show / episode.

6. **Podcast Player Recommendations**
   - ○ Do not implement Auto-play. This will result in a bad user experience for the user with audio they were not expecting to hear.
   - ○ Do not Pre-load - unless the intent was clearly to play the podcast.
   - ○ Use ID3v2 tags, so that the headers are located at the start of the podcast (not at the end). This allows players to use the ID3 data ahead of streaming time without downloading the full podcast file.
   - ○ ID3 tag sizes - recommend that the ID3 size be limited to 300kb with 800x800 px max for the art.
   - ○ For a full download, ask for the entire file in one go. For a progressive download, ask for the file in slices (byte range). This way a full download can be distinguished from a progressive download.
   - ○ Do not modify the enclosure URL when requesting media, don't add extra parameters.
   - ○ Do not cache podcast episodes on your servers. Always download the latest episode from the enclosure URL for every app user wanting to listen.
   - ○ Use the GUID -- as opposed to episode URL, title, publication date, etc. -- to identify new episodes in the RSS feed that should be automatically downloaded to a user's device. The GUID is designed to be persistent through changes to hosting environment, titles, etc.

- Employ an "automatic download unsubscribe" behavior (e.g. - stop auto downloads after 5 episodes of non-listens).
- Do not automatically download all episodes (e.g. back catalog episodes) by default. This creates an unnecessary drain on the publishers' servers and consumes users' bandwidth.

7. **Valid User Agent Structure (optional)**
   - Provide enough details in the user-agent header to allow it to be consistently differentiated from the user agent of other devices.
   - Recommended that platforms be conservative in adding unnecessary information to the user-agent string, and in encoding practices.
   - Recommend that platforms submit their user-agent header value to the IAB Spiders and Bots white list so that it is not considered a bot and can be a signal used to determine the device information. If the app or platform does employ the use of bots to index content, it is recommended to specify a user-agent that is distinct from the application user-agent and includes the word "bot" to clearly identify its use case.
   - Recommended use of the following pattern to build the user-agent in order to provide a consistent structure for all parties who consume the details:

<app name>/<app version><device info> <os name>/<os version><other info>

For example:

AppName/1.2.3 DeviceBrand DeviceModel OSName/1.2.3 LibName/1.2.3

Publication of Certification Status

Upon successful completion of the certification testing process and approval of certification, the company is issued the Podcast Measurement certificate and IAB Tech Lab compliance seal. They can use the seal to publicly communicate their Podcast Measurement certification. In addition, IAB Tech

Lab will also list the companies who have been issued certification on our website here: https://iabtechlab.com/compliance-programs/compliant-companies/#

Continued Certification

Companies who have achieved Podcast Measurement certification are responsible for maintaining the integrity of their certification. They must recertify when there are significant technology changes made to their podcast hosting and measurement systems, or they upgrade to include new features of podcast guidelines. For continued use of the seal and certificate, a company must submit for certification at least once in the past 12 months. This is to ensure the integrity of their implementation and to ensure trust in the industry.

Recertification

Upon completion of the first engagement, an annual re-engagement date will be set. To maintain continuous certification status for Podcast Measurement Guidelines, companies must either:

1. If on an older version than the current published guidelines, update to the latest version in order to validate the proper adoption of the latest guideline requirements.
2. Continue to ensure the platform adheres to the current guidelines in place and is validated for continued compliance within the guidelines at least once every 12 months.