

iab.TECH LAB

Ad Creative ID Framework (ACIF)

Version 1.0

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Please provide feedback on this draft by July 12, 2024. Send your comments, suggestions, and questions to support@iabtechlab.com. This document is available online at <https://iabtechlab.com/acif>

About This Document

The IAB Tech Lab Ad Creative ID Framework was conceived and developed by the [Advanced TV Commit Group](#) to support ad creative registration and the use of the unique IDs generated by the process in the video and CTV supply chain.

About IAB Tech Lab

The IAB Technology Laboratory is a nonprofit research and development consortium charged with producing and helping companies implement global industry technical standards and solutions. The goal of the Tech Lab is to reduce friction associated with the digital advertising and marketing supply chain while contributing to the safe growth of an industry. The IAB Tech Lab spearheads the development of technical standards, creates and maintains a code library to assist in rapid, cost-effective implementation of IAB standards, and establishes a test platform for companies to evaluate the compatibility of their technology solutions with IAB standards, which for 18 years have been the foundation for interoperability and profitable growth in the digital advertising supply chain. Further details about the IAB Technology Lab can be found at <https://iabtechlab.com>.

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Executive Summary

In the world of digital video, ads are packaged for delivery, typically using IAB Tech Lab's [Video Ad Serving Template \(VAST\)](#). This package, or VAST tag, includes a link to the video file, links to other files that might accompany the video creative, tracking URLs, metadata about duration, category, the ad system serving the ad, and other details that help describe the ad.

In most cases, the ad includes some kind of ID. The origin of this ID may be unknown and the ID may be unique to the platform serving the ad, consequently meaning it could be different when served from another ad platform. To the publisher requesting the ad, the same ad served from different ad platforms might look like a different ad. This is a problem when the publisher tries to account for frequency capping, competitive separation, or other ad decisioning algorithms.

For the advertiser, trying to reconcile the ad creative across channels and publishers can mean hours of work to recall some bit of metadata about the ad that matches the platforms' data logs. The problem is only exacerbated when trying to look at the same creative in traditional linear and connected television (CTV) environments.

To improve publisher ad decisioning, log more consistent results about the placement, and to reduce the resources that the advertiser puts into ad creative reconciliation, IAB Tech Lab's Advanced TV Working Group proposes the Ad Creative ID Framework (ACIF), designed to support ad registration, validation, and consistent metadata.

What is the Ad Creative ID Framework?

ACIF supports the use of registered creative IDs that persist cross-platform. This project focuses on supporting registered ad creative used in TV-viewing environments. While ad registration is nothing new for video, especially in traditional TV programming models, the supply chain in digital video and CTV has lacked a supportive framework for adhering registered IDs to ads and maintaining that ID as the ad moves through the video ad supply chain.

Benefits of ACIF

Each ad creative file moves through several non-connected advertising systems and business entities as part of the creation, distribution, serving, execution, and reporting functions of any given ad campaign. An ID is associated with the creative at various points in the campaign life cycle. Each business entity also has their own means of understanding details like advertiser name, brand and product. As each platform may manage these values differently, matching the

labels across platforms is a tedious mapping process that can cost the video ad market millions of hours of work each year.

In the supply chain as-is, one ad creative might be associated with multiple IDs and labels, many of which might not be mapped to each other. To software making automated decisions, a single ad looks like many different ads. Imagine how this chaos might impact the ability to manage a standard advertiser requirement like frequency capping!

Use Cases

ACIF's goal is to enable all parties to map to a single unique ID for the creative and use standard labels the advertiser creates for things like advertiser name and product. With the framework in place, the following use cases become more efficient and support the more rigid ad exchange in CTV environments.

- **Frequency Capping:** When a single ad is delivered from different sources with different identifiers and labels, the algorithm for frequency capping might see the same ad from multiple systems as multiple ads. With a unique ID generated as part of an ad registration process, ad-decisioning algorithms can more easily track ad frequency.
- **Competitive Separation:** In a similar way, if the ad systems each label an ad differently it creates a challenge for determining the advertiser and product being served. If an advertising system is unsure of the advertiser or product, it is equally difficult to ensure it isn't displayed next to a competitive brand or product. With a supportive framework in place that standardizes basic metadata about the ad, competitive separation is simplified.
- **Cross-platform measurement:** Logging ad views under different IDs and labels in different systems complicates the ability to compare log data from one ad platform to another. Lack of a common identifier creates inconsistencies in the data and ultimately breaks down the accuracy of media reporting. While a registered ID doesn't enable measurement, it does produce more reliable results for ads measured.
- **Creative Reconciliation:** Companies all along the video supply chain put millions of hours as a whole into tracking down ads for placement and later details on how they were served. Tying performance to ad creative is a desired but elusive goal for advertisers. Supplying a unique creative ID that persists throughout the supply chain offers a single hook into any data set, surfacing all log data associated with that ID.

ACIF intends to foster the practice of ad registration and support ad validation and consistent metadata, which improves cross-platform ad decisioning, measurement, and creative reconciliation.

Components of ACIF

ACIF is a framework of components that work together to support ad operations throughout the life of a video/CTV ad campaign. These components are briefly described below and described in more detail throughout the rest of this document.

- **Registries:** Businesses that maintain records for ad creative and assign each a unique ID. Organizations such as AD-ID in the US, Clearcast in the UK and CIM in Belgium are examples. Tech Lab seeks to include all existing registries in the Framework.
- **Standardized Use of registered IDs:** The [VAST addendum](#) ensures ease of transport of the registered ID through the supply chain by making the UniversalAdID fields in 4.x backwards compatible with earlier versions. Our working groups will also evaluate needs in other standards such as OpenRTB and Open Measurement SDK.
- **Directory:** IAB Tech Lab will provide a listing of regional Registries that point to each registry's validation process or endpoint. The purpose of a directory is to enable advertising systems to identify where and how to validate a registered creative ID from a participating Registry. Minimal requirements for a directory include:
 - **Registry URL/code:** a URL (root domain) for the registry must be supplied as a unique identifier for the registry. *At a later stage of development, we will consider implementing a code system in which each registry is assigned a unique 3-character code to further enable automation and also support systems where payload for the ID is limited, such as in the case for using video watermarks.*
 - **Lookup info:** registries should provide details about how a business can validate IDs. Ideally, each registry would eventually support a programmatic method for validation and receiving associated metadata.
- **Validation:** A standardized API to lookup any registered IDs for ads that an advertising system encounters. For example, AD-ID currently provides an API that enables an advertising system to lookup an ID. AD-ID confirms whether the ID exists in their registry, and if it does, returns metadata about the company that owns the ad. Tech Lab has proposed a Registry Validation API as a standard request/response protocol through which to do this. The standard details a minimum set of metadata, but ad registries may provide additional metadata as a service to meet the needs of their clients. The use of a standard validation API gives semantic meaning to the registry and ID information carried in the VAST tag, allowing consumers to programmatically access metadata in a consistent manner, regardless of the registry.

These components and how they work together as part of a framework are described in more detail in the following sections.

Ad Registration

ACIF begins with ad registration. The products represented in ads have most likely been assigned a Universal Product Code (UPC). UPCs enable the efficiency of tracking products as they move from the manufacturer to the store where it is purchased. They help store owners keep their inventory stocked, and they help shipping organizations move products from ships to airplanes to local delivery trucks. Imagine if all ads had the same kind of universal identifier as assigned to the products represented in their ads.

Ad registration, like the process for assigning a UPC, is the act of filing ad creative with your regional ad authority under the advertiser's name along with the brand and product represented. Additional metadata might also include ad title and campaign ID. The unique ID generated for a registered ad enables ad tech vendors to make a request to the ad registration authority, retrieve metadata associated with the ad, and use that information in ad decisioning, measurement, and creative reconciliation.

The Cost (of not registering ads)

What you pay to register an ad is between you, your finance people, and your local ad registration authority. However, what you end up paying is nowhere near the cost of managing ad campaigns without the use of registered ad IDs.

Without appropriate steps to register ad creative and make use of their assigned IDs, advertisers and their partners incur costs in the following ways:

- **Creative Reconciliation:** each year, millions of hours across the industry are estimated to consume company resources for tracking down ad creative over the course of a campaign.
- **Brand Image:** when consumers watch a show and see an ad three times in a row or in the wrong context, the brand's image is likely to diminish. Without a stable unique ID, ad-decisioning systems struggle to manage frequency, competitive separation, and brand suitability.
- **Publisher Image:** likewise for a content provider, poor ad-decisioning can degrade the user experience and ultimately cause a drop in audience.
- **Partner/Customer Relationships:** Plenty of things can go wrong and cause friction over the course of a campaign. Poor ad placement doesn't have to be among those issues.
- **Labor Costs:** companies incur unnecessary hours across several departments from media reporting, tracking (ad/ops) and billing/finance as they work to coordinate details about ad creative in a given campaign.

Workflow

The most common barrier to ad registration is workflow. Who registers the ad? Where is the assigned ID stored? Does the campaign management software include a field for supplying the registered ID? Do junior account representatives know about ad registration and what to do with the ID?

Setting up a proper workflow to handle ad registration is the most important thing a company can do to support ACIF. Brands and agencies carry the heart of the workflow, but other companies in the supply chain can also play a role.

The following checklist offers a starting point for adjusting workflow to manage ad registration:

- Assign a lead role in your company to manage ad registration. Consider whether additional staff is needed to support that lead role.
- Determine at what point in campaign development is the ad creative registered. Target the people or partner company responsible for that phase of development to refine the process so that ad registration always happens. The process should include the following:
 - Contact info for the regional ad registry
 - Naming conventions for brand, product, ad title
 - Steps for entering the registered ID in any software interface that stores or manages the ad
 - Technical automation that transfers the ID from software to any transport mechanism such as VAST
- Document your corporate ad registration process and make it available to relevant staff.
- For any staff in your organization who handle ad creative, train them on the importance of ad registration and their role in knowing where to find the ID, knowing how to enter the ID in any campaign management interface, and knowing how to pass the ID along with the ad creative.
- For any partner on-boarding, include details about the registered ad ID and as applicable, how to supply it, how to use it, and how to pass it when necessary.
- Consider updating any in-house software to include interface references for any fields related to ad registration.

Any steps your organization can take toward defining and maintaining a consistent workflow for ad registration will have a heavy impact on moving the video ad supply chain to a more organized, streamlined, and transparent system.

Standardization in the Supply Chain

Ad registration for all ads in the video supply chain is the first step—and a very important one—but additional measures are needed to make use of the unique ad creative ID. For any standard used to request, respond, and transport the video ad, an element to communicate the ID is needed. Along with the technology, ad ops staff need to be aware of the ID, where to find it, how to use it, and how to pass it on to maintain consistency in the supply chain.

The two standards addressed in this version of ACIF are the Video Ad Serving Template (VAST) and Open Real-Time Bidding (OpenRTB).

Normalizing Use of VAST’s Universal Ad ID

VAST has been established as the standard for delivering video ads. VAST 2.0 was released April 2012 and became widely adopted in the market. Additional versions were released in the following years but VAST 2.0 remains the most popular version, with VAST 3.0 as a close second.

Two Key Components

VAST 4.0 introduced the <UniversalAdId> node for placing two key components of a registered ad ID:

- The ID assigned
- The root URL for the ad registration authority

The reason both of these details are needed is so that ad tech vendors that encounter the ID know where to look it up. While earlier VAST versions include nodes for supply creative IDs and specifically an ID from the ad registration authority, Ad-ID.org, none of the ID nodes included a parameter for attributing the ad registration authority. This attribute is vital to standardizing the use of registered ad IDs in the video supply chain.

VAST CTV Addendum 2024

With the release of ACIF 1.0, we are including an addendum that standardizes a set of extensions and guidance for all VAST users. The [VAST CTV Addendum 2024](#) enables VAST users of versions that predate VAST 4.0 to implement the <UniversalAdId> and its two key components for both the ID and the ad registration authority URL.

Along with the <UniversalAdId> extension, additional extensions help to standardize other features introduced in VAST 4.x for Open Measurement SDK integration, interactivity with SIMID, and higher resolution creative files for bigger screens encountered in CTV.

ACIF Directory

Because ad registration is handled in different global regions by authorities in those regions, ACIF requires a listing of each regional authority. This listing, along with the URL attribute for the ad registration authority accompanying the ID, gives ad tech vendors info about how to validate the ID and pull basic metadata about the advertiser and brand represented in the ad.

The ACIF Directory is included in Tech Lab's Tools Portal under Specification Adoption.

Overview of ACIF Specification Adoption

The Specification Adoption Program by IAB Tech Lab empowers companies to self-declare their usage of IAB Tech Lab specifications in their operational settings. Through this program, companies can indicate their status as an Ad Creative Registry and/or Joint Industry Committee (JIC) member.

Other companies in the supply chain can also self-assert their implementation of the Ad Creative ID Framework (ACIF) specification. Implementation assumes updates to both workflow and technical updates that support ad registration and correct use of the unique ID wherever it applies to the company submitting their self-assertion.

How to Register

To register your company, you first need a [Tools Portal](#) login using an email address associated with your company's domain name. Registration on the Tools Portal is free. Once you've obtained your company login, proceed to the [Specification Adoption](#) section.

The Specification Adoption program consists of two main components: **Registration** and **Search**. Initiating the registration process involves clicking the **Begin Your Self Attestation** button. During this phase, you can upload your company logo, designate relevant ad tech categories, and specify the IAB Tech Lab specifications you've integrated into your production environments.

As an ad registration authority or JIC, select Ad Creative ID Framework (ACIF). Provide information for your company and supply a link that provides information about how ad tech vendors can validate IDs registered in your system.

Optionally, you can supply contact information for two partners that can confirm your participation. For adoption of other specifications in the program, we require this, but it's optional for ACIF.

Accessing Your Registration

Upon successful registration with the Specification Adoption program for any specification, your company's information will be included in the [Specification Adoption dataset](#) within the **Data Explorer** feature of the Tools Portal. Additionally, if you've self-declared your implementation of the Ad Creative ID Framework, your company will be listed in the [Ad Creative ID Framework dataset](#). This dataset is accessible to all Tools Portal users. Ad Creative ID Framework registrations are also programmatically accessible through our [Creative Registries API endpoint](#).

For inquiries or feedback, please contact IAB Tech Lab at support@iabtechlab.com.

Validation

The fourth component of ACIF is the ability to validate registered ad creative when their unique IDs (UniversalAdId as termed in VAST) are encountered in the video ad supply chain. Ad tech companies wishing to validate UniversalAdIds can use the [ACIF Directory](#) to look up the ad registries and how each enables validation and metadata retrieval.

Taking Action

Different parties in the video ad supply chain need to take the following actions to participate in the Framework.

Ad Creative Registries: Regional registry operators will need to submit self-attestation in [Tech Lab's Transparency Center](#) for support of ACIF. This central access should improve reach as Tech Lab works to increase ad registration in digital formats.

Publishers: Publishers, networks, distributors (MVPDs) will need to be educated on ACIF and how to point their partners and customers to supporting materials on [Tech Lab's ACIF website](#) for registering their creative with the regional ad registry and providing IDs. They will also want to leverage the support of registered IDs and upgrade their algorithms to use registered IDs for better ad decisioning and improved product offerings. Publisher video players will need to update their player code to look for the <UniversalAdId> in VAST responses, either in the extensions outlined in the [2024 VAST CTV Addendum](#) for versions 2 and 3, or in the designated existing field introduced in VAST 4.

Ad Tech: DSPs, SSPs, SSAI, DMPs, measurement vendors, and other ad tech services will want to know how to look up listed ACIF registries in [Tech Lab's Transparency Center](#) and work with them to validate inbound IDs and receive relevant metadata about

the ad registered. When the Validation API is ready, ad tech companies will want to update their platforms to leverage the API for automated ad validation, decisioning, and reconciliation. They may also want to consider working with brands and agencies on the workflow for getting ads registered and supplying IDs in the VAST tag.

Agencies and brands: Agencies and brands will want to work with their creative partners and DSP partners to determine the workflow for who will register ads. For the parties that generate the VAST tag for the ad, developers will need to upgrade VAST tag generators to include registered IDs as outlined in the [2024 VAST CTV Addendum](#). Account managers responsible for setting up campaign details should be educated on registered IDs and the value to supply in the campaign interface that corresponds to the VAST field for <UniversalAdId>.

Creative Agency/Developers: Depending on the workflow with partners and customers, creative developers may be the designated party to register ad creative. These companies should be clear on the workflow with partners for who registers the ad and be consistent about supplying the ID with the ad when turned over to the customer.