The Cross-Retailer Halo Effect: What Siloed Attribution Misses

Data Insights
from Incremental

Contents

Executive Summary

Siloed last-touch attribution remains the default measurement for commerce media. However, as commerce media has moved up the funnel, last-touch attribution obscures, and in many cases, under-attributes the impact of retail media. Meta analysis by Incremental across 150,000 campaigns and $350M in spend reveals two consistent challenges:

Upper-funnel is under-valued by siloed last-touch.

Ads on one retailer frequently drive sales at others.

Online media drives in-store purchases.

A significant portion of this cross-retailer impact is in-store.

While search's impact is largely contained within the retailer where the ad runs, with over 90% of the impact occurring with the same retailer, display behaves differently. Across the four retailers and RMNs analyzed, **upwards of 50% of the impact of DSP campaigns occur at other retailers**.

Retail media does not just drive online impact, but influences in-store purchases. While retailer search tends to influence online sales or online pickup and delivery (OPD), **DSP campaigns have meaningful in-store activity with 40%+ of the impact occurring in-store for categories like CPG** across both that retailer and outside retailers.

Taken together, these findings show that retail media operates beyond the environments where it is measured today. The implication is structural: **Measuring retail media within retailer boundaries obscures a meaningful portion of its impact**, and introduces systematic bias into performance evaluation. That then leads to poor planning and missed optimization opportunities. Overcoming these challenges with stronger cross-retailer measurement is essential for retail media to continue to be used as a full-funnel tool.

The Rise of Brand Dollars in Commerce Media

Retail Media's Move Up The Funnel Creates Measurement Challenges For the Historical RMN Toolkit

Over the past five years, commerce media has become the fastest-growing segment in digital advertising. Retailers have become large-scale advertising businesses, monetizing shopper data and ad inventory across their digital properties.

- U.S. retail media ad spend is projected to reach ~$70B[1] in 2026, reflecting sustained growth and scale.
- Growth is concentrated: Amazon alone accounts for more than 3/4[2] of U.S. retail media spend, with other retailers rapidly scaling.
- Retail media continues to grow at double the pace of the overall ad market.[3]
- 70% of retail media spending is incremental to brands' annual trade budgets, with the majority is being funded by brand and media budgets.4

$70B
Projected 2026 U.S. retail media ad spend

>75%
Amazon's share of U.S. retail media ad spend

2X
Retail media ad spend growth vs. spend overall

70%
of retail media spend is incremental to trade budgets

[1] https://content-naf.emarketer.com/retail-media-ad-spending-forecast-trends-h2-2025
[2] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1237312/retail-media-ad-spend-share-platform/
[3] https://www.iab.com/news/report-digital-advertising-growth-retail-media-ctv-social/
[4] https://newsroom.transunion.com/seven-in-ten-companies-plan-to-increase-retail-media-budgets-but-scale-and-measurement-remain-key-barriers/

What began as a way to influence shoppers at the point of sale has become a full-funnel strategy, as RMNs have broadened their capability set and connected their data to premium display and video inventory online and on CTV.

As the capabilities have been built, RMNs have courted national brand dollars, having already consumed a significant portion of manufacturers' shopper and trade budgets. Taking on national brand dollars comes with a different set of objectives. Compared to shopper dollars aimed at influencing the shopper at the point of purchase, and trade dollars aimed at growing a specific channel or category, **brand dollars' objective is to generate and sustain the brand's equity in the market**, which in turn should drive growth across all sales channels.

This runs at odds with the default measurement available across RMNs. utting aside the deficiencies of last-touch attribution, the goal of trade and shopper dollars aligns - or at least does not misalign - with the idea of driving sales at a particular retailer. For brand dollars, however, this attribution methodology misses the mark. **If the goal is to drive lift across all sales channels, measuring against a single retailer creates a critical blind spot.**

Closed-Loop's Blind Spot

The challenge isn't with closed-loop measurement itself; deterministic linkages across first-party data is an incredible asset in developing robust measurement. The challenge is the lack of interoperability between retailers. Understandably, retailers are guarded about sharing their data, especially with direct competitors on the media and retail sides of their business.

This creates a structural limitation to closed-loop measurement in retail media, leading to multiple self-contained attribution systems that are only able to observe impact within their own ecosystem. Any impact that extends beyond or across those boundaries is, by definition, invisible.

Shoppers on the other hand, do not operate within silos. Cross-shopping, where consumers compare and purchase across multiple retailers, is a common and expected behavior. **Advertising on one RMN can influence consumers that purchase elsewhere.**

Combined, this produces a distorted picture of performance, particularly for upper funnel brand media. Campaigns may appear to drive retailer-specific outcomes, but have limited impact on consumers more broadly, or the impact may look small because only a fraction of the effect is being measured at a single retailer. It reflects **a fundamental mismatch between how consumers behave and how performance is measured**.

The Vicious Cycle

This gap has a materially negative impact for both advertisers and retailers. For RMNs it can lead to an under-value of upper-funnel media, making it harder for them to further court or even keep brand budgets. Lower reported ROAS in turn can lead advertisers to pull back on upper-funnel investment, creating a vicious cycle for both retailers and advertisers.

The negative effects of sustained under-investment in brand media is well-documented,[4] often leading to declining customer acquisition pools, rising acquisition costs, and ultimately plateauing or declining long-term growth.

As retail media continues to scale and capture more brand dollars, this gap will only become more consequential.

[4] https://ipa.co.uk/knowledge/effectiveness-research-analysis/les-binet-peter-field

Data & Analysis

Incremental reviewed a broad cross-section of brands and categories, analyzing the performance of four large RMNs' abilities to drive incremental sales across each of the four respective retailers. These included both search and DSP (display/video) campaigns. We looked at the incremental sales driven on the corresponding retail channel for that RMN, as well as the other three retailers, including in-store sales for omni-channel retailers that have a brick and mortar presence. This enabled us to estimate how much of the impact of retail media is missed by siloed attribution today, and how that differs across search and DSP.

The analysis was based on more than $350M in ad spend across nearly 150,000 campaigns during a 12-month period.

Of the RMNs analyzed, all four had search offerings and three of the four had DSP (video/display) offerings.

The impact of these campaigns was measured against four large retailers, covering $565M in gross merchandise value across nearly 350,000 unique products.

Two of these retailers were omni-channel (selling both online and in-store) and two were ecommerce pure plays, only selling online. Across the brands analyzed, **these four retailers represent between 40-80% of the total sales universe for the brands**. This last point is critical to note as the impact here is **still likely understating the total effect** across the remaining universe of sales.

The results can be seen in the table below, a cross-retailer measure of impact, accounting for the **halo effect** that investment with one RMN can have on driving sales through another retailer. The results expressed as an average iROI for that channel, indexed to the average On-Retailer Impact across all media channels as the baseline.

Indexed iROI

		On-Retailer	Off-Retailer	Total	% Off-Retailer
Media Channel	Search	$1.24	$0.08	$1.31	6%
	On-Site DSP	$1.00	$0.40	$1.40	29%
	Off-Site DSP (Total)	$0.77	$0.87	$1.64	52%
	Off-Site DSP (Display)	$0.80	$0.56	$1.36	41%
	Off-Site DSP (Video)	$0.74	$1.18	$1.91	62%
	Avg.	$1.00	$0.45	$1.45	

Due to the unique hierarchical structure of the Incremental model, incremental sales are measured at the sales modality level enabling the impac to be split across online, online pick-up in-store (OPD), or in-store.

	% Online	**% OPD**	**% In-Store**
On-Site Search	66%	27%	7%
On-Site DSP	24%	38%	38%
Off-Site DSP	41%	24%	35%
Off-Site Display	48%	22%	30%
Off-Site Video	29%	29%	42%

Findings

Across all four RMNs, as well as search and DSP, the data shows that siloed attribution is under-crediting retail media, though the degree varies.

Search's impact is mostly captured at the retailer where the ad ran.

Across the data analyzed, **93% of the impact was captured within that retailer's own environment**. Given the very short half-life of search campaigns due to the high intent of the shopper, it is not surprising that most of the impact happens right then and there with the retailer. However, even the modest halo impact of search on other retailers highlights the reality and importance in understanding consumer cross-shopping behavior. Consumers do appear to be using retailer search for product research, not just immediate purchase.

For Omni-Retailers, Search Has Some In-Store Effect

While search's effect is primarily online for shipping or for pickup (OPD), there is still some influence on in-store purchases, likely an effect of consumers using retailer search for research or list-building ahead of shopping in-store. This was particularly present **for omni-channel retailers, with 11-17% of the impact occurring as in-store purchases.**

DSP is Being Significantly Under-Credited

Channel	On-Retailer	Off-Retailer	Total	% Off-Retailer
Search	$1.24	$0.08	$1.31	**6%**
On Site DSP	$1.00	$0.40	$1.40	**29%**
Off-Site DSP	$0.77	$0.87	$1.64	**52%**

Compared to search, DSP ads run through RMNs drive significantly more of their impact outside of the corresponding retailer. **For ads run on-site an additional 29% of the impact occurred off-retailer, when analyzing media that ran offsite from the retailer that jumps to 52%** of the impact occurring outside of that retailer's sales channels. Considering that these retailers only account for 40-80% of the total sales universe for each brand, the total iROI when accounting for this halo impact on other sales channels is likely even higher.

DSP Drives In-Store

Channel	Online	OPD	In-Store
Search	66%	27%	7%
On SIte DSP	24%	38%	**38%**
Off SIte DSP	41%	24%	**35%**

This large cross retailer halo impact is in part because DSP campaigns don't just drive online sales, but have a meaningful impact on brick-and-mortar sales as well. Even **DSP onsite within their e-retailer environment have a meaningful impact on physical brick and mortar sales.** Compared to search, Display and Video ads often have a longer effective half-life or lag effect on consumer behavior. They are able to generate an impression in consumers memory which persists longer than search better allowing these channels to influence in-store purchases which often occur at a later date.

Offsite Video Drives the Largest Cross-Retailer Halo

Channel	On-Retailer	Off-Retailer
DSP Display	59%	41%
DSP Video	38%	**62%**

The strongest halo effect on off-retailer sales was observed among offsite video inventory. With often a longer delay between exposure and purchase, upper funnel video ads give the consumer more time to convert through outside sales channels.

Channel	Online	OPD	In-Store
DSP Display	48%	22%	30%
DSP Video	29%	29%	**42%**

This is also mirrored with **a higher proportion of those sales occurring in-store** compared to display ads.

The Total Halo Impact Is Likely Even Larger

Across the brands analyzed the sub-set of retailers included included in the analysis represented between 40-80% of the total universe of sales for the brand. Assuming a similar cross-retailer effect exists among the retailers not analyzed, there would be 20-60% of the impact still missing in this analysis. While the halo effect across retailers likely differs between large and smaller and potentially regional retailers as a starting point to size the total impact being missed by siloed attribution we've factored the halo impact to account for this missing 20-60% of sales.

	iROI			
	On-Retailer	**Off-Retailer**	**Total**	**Off-Retailer Halo %**
On-Site Search	$1.24	$0.09-$0.19	$1.33-$1.43	7%-13%
On-Site DSP	$1.00	$0.50-$1.00	$1.50-$1.99	33%-50%
Off-Site DSP	$0.77	$1.09-$2.18	$1.86-$2.94	59%-74%
Off-Site Display	$0.80	$0.70-$1.41	$1.50-$2.21	47%-64%
Off-Site Video	$0.74	$1.47-$2.95	$2.21-$3.68	67%-80%
Avg.	$1.00	$0.56-$1.12	$1.56-$2.12	36%-53%

Accounting for these missing sales **suggests that 36%-53% of retail media impact is being missed today with as high as 67-80% of impact within offsite video.** This is a massive systemic underreporting of effect and poises a serious challenge as more brand dollars flow into these channels.

Summary of Findings

Taken together, these patterns point to a consistent dynamic: **retail media frequently influences purchases that occur outside the retailer environment where the ad was served.**

This is the Cross-Retailer Media Halo Effect.

Conclusion: Rethinking Retail Media & Brand Budgets

It is clear that retail media can be effective not just at influencing shoppers and driving growth within a single retailer but driving incremental growth across all sales channels, fulfilling the objective of national brand dollars.

It is also clear today that siloed attribution is under-crediting the ROI of those brand dollars, particularly in offsite display/video campaigns by a factor of 3-5x.

Continued siloed measurement poses a serious long-term risk to both retail media networks and advertisers in the form of a vicious cycle, where poor performance of brand dollars leads to those dollars being shifted into performance tactics lower in the funnel. The reduced air cover of upper-funnel investments, in turn, creates a drag on lower-funnel performance — increasing CAC and making those investments less efficient. Collapsing profit then makes it harder to re-invest at the top of the funnel.

If brand dollars are going to continue to flow into retail media networks, it is imperative that they are measured in a way that better represents their impact across retailers and on a brand's performance.

From Siloed ROAS to Cross-Retailer Incrementality

Better alignment to the objectives of brand dollars requires a two-fold shift in measurement:

1. Shifting from last-touch attribution to an incrementality-based measure of performance. Last-touch attribution inherently under-credits upper-funnel attribution, which often has a longer delay before purchase.
2. Moving from a siloed attribution tied to a single retailer to a cross-retailer view that captures the halo effect on other sales channels.

There are sources for this type of measurement today. Marketing Mix Models (MMMs) typically use total sales across all retailers as their dependent variable. While this provides a total holistic ROI that accounts for this halo effect, it often lacks retailer-specific impact. Experimentation also provides a strong tool, so long as the design includes sales across all retailers. Given data access limitations and legal restrictions on co-mingling user-level data across retailers, this isn't currently possible using first-party data directly from retailers.

The challenge is that retailer media does not just need to support the broad objectives of brand dollars, but must also support the pointed objectives of shopper and trade dollars. To best support retail media's multiple objectives as a result of receiving funding through trade, shopper, and brand budgets, measurement is required through two lenses:

- Retailer-specific outcome measurement to support sales and shopper teams' goals within a retailer
- Broader cross-retailer measurement to ensure brand dollars are driving impact across all channels where consumers make brand purchases

End-to-End Planning

Retail media increasingly sits at the intersection of brand, shopper, and trade dollars — creating tensions in both measurement and planning that raise a number of important points:

- Given the limited headroom to further increase overall Advertising & Promotion investment without compressing margins, will this create internal competition over those RMN dollars?
- Tensions as dollars flow from traditional national brand media channels into RMNs.
- It also raises questions of dependency - how much of a brand's overall advertising investment do they want tied to a single media platform?
- It requires greater coordination between teams managing media execution, particularly in instances when different agency partners may be executing each of the budgets separately.

It may also lead to ambiguity: Who "owns" the planning process when it straddles so many budgets and objectives? How is media execution coordinated with non-media teams managing assortment, inventory, and content?

INCREMENTAL™

Incremental is a causal intelligence platform built to help brands understand what their retail media is truly delivering and act on those insights to drive incremental sales. We work with the data retailers already provide to measure the real impact of media across environments without relying on personal information. The platform is designed to deliver clarity at an operational pace, resulting in insights that support daily optimization and activation decisions, while also improving forecasting and planning over time.

Learn more at **incremental.com.**