

SWIMMING UPSTREAM: INVENTING AND REINVENTING CONSUMER RESEARCH ON TABLETS

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Introduction

On the morning of April 3, 2010, the media landscape as we knew it was trembling at the advent of a platform that would soon drastically alter how consumers interact with media platforms and the advertising within them. The iPad's release that day heralded not just the birth of [the modern tablet](#), but an entirely new media or connection opportunity for advertisers and content consumption device for content owners.

Three years later, the U.S. is now home to 70 million tablet users, marking tablets as the [fastest-growing innovation in history](#). The tablet has such wide appeal for consumers that its connection to them can be likened to nothing other than magic. Practically skipping the early adopter phase, tablets are now used by nearly one in four Americans. Furthermore, tablet owners report spending an average of [90 minutes per day](#) with their devices in a wide variety of places from the [couch to the airport](#). It's clear that this platform has triggered a seismic shift in consumer behavior.

After the release of the iPad, we at VivaKi recognized the tidal wave of change on the horizon. An enormous and collaborative effort was needed to find the best ways for advertisers to use the platform to connect with their consumers. We recognized early on, that the opportunity was greater than just moving standard print or digital display or video ads to the platform. The Pool is a VivaKi consortium that works with key stakeholders in the industry to identify an advertising issue. From these discussions, a new area of focus, or "lane," is launched. Despite the many swimming analogies, the premise of the Pool is that the more we can share, the faster we will learn. Our purpose is to create industry alignment on advertising solutions through the process of pooling resources and the uncovering of human insights. Participants join a lane on a specific topic/platform (such as online video or cross-media measures), and submit numerous ideas for potential solutions or ad models. These ideas are then narrowed down through group voting and The Pool's research process, which typically involves a three-phased approach of qualitative, quantitative, and field trial research. At the conclusion of a lane, we find a winning "ad model" solution and provide the results to the industry to accelerate the adoption of the ad model for the marketplace and drive advertiser demand.

The Pool launched its most ambitious study to-date: the Tablet Lane, in November 2011. Twenty-six companies participated, including 13 blue-chip advertisers and 13 best-in-class publishers/media companies. Together our goal was to gain insights regarding which ad models could deliver a more satisfying tablet consumer experience while also serving the needs of the advertiser. Our journey took us through 14 months of research, conducted in three separate phases, each of which challenged us to invent and reinvent how to undertake such research on a tablet device. Our Tablet Lane developed and anointed three winning ad models that we demonstrated were able to outperform basic tablet ad benchmarks based on ad models transferred from online display or video. Along the way, we created a set of tablet ad [best practices](#) benefiting advertisers, publishers, and consumers alike.

With the rapid growth and development of the tablet as a content device, one where users are in complete control of their consumption, the Pool lane was launched at a critical moment, recognizing the need early on for new types of advertising that would engage and delight consumers in ways that would be beneficial to media owners, marketers and, above all, the consumers themselves. The research task was especially challenging, both in terms of technical issues and data collection, but by overcoming these hurdles, we were able to deliver on all of the goals that we set at the start.

Research Overview

The Tablet Lane participants first met in October 2011 with over 100 people in attendance and shared 37 different ad model ideas to consider for testing. During this meeting, the group evaluated all ideas based on a series of business and consumer considerations. These included mode of engagement, memorability and noticeability, empowerment, ease and simplicity, value and utility, trackability, scalability, flexibility, extendibility, and ease of implementation. The group then voted to determine the top six models to move forward into the qualitative phase of the research.

Once research began, each of the new ad units was compared to a benchmark model, a standard ad model already commonly used on tablets. Due to the wide range of media consumed on tablets, we selected separate benchmarks to allow us to study Web, print, and video content. Accordingly, we chose three benchmark models: static Web banners, static interstitials, and standard Pre-rolls. After the qualitative research was complete, the group met again to review the findings and voted to move three of the six models forward into quantitative testing.

At the conclusion of quantitative testing, the group met for the third time to review the results and voted again on which model(s) to move forward to the field trial. Although in prior lanes we had selected just one ad model to test in live media,

for the Tablet Lane we agreed that our quantitative findings dictated the need to continue with all three units in the third phase. Finally, the last meeting was held at the conclusion of the field trial when the group reviewed the research and determined the winning models for the Tablet Lane.

The following details each phase of the research and the challenges that we had to overcome. Perhaps one indicator of that is that, by the end of the research we had actually tested 130 custom executions across the six ad units we started with. The findings are the result of 26,000 hours spent with the industry and 831,000 hours spent with 20 million consumers.

Phase One: Qualitative Research

The first phase of the research was undertaken in partnership with Alternate Routes, a Los Angeles-based research company. It was comprised of 12 focus groups in two cities: Austin, TX and San Diego, CA. Focus group participants were segmented across three age groups: teens (15-17), young adults (18-34), and older adults (35-54). All adult participants had to have a minimum of a high school education, an income of \$20,000 per year (single) or \$35,000 per year (married), broadband Internet access at home, and a tablet.

The six new models voted to be included in the research were called AdBank, ASq/ASq Social, Banner to Full Page, Pre-roll with Overlay, ReOrient Express, and Rich Media Interstitial. AdBank was a 'rewards'-based concept, where consumers could 'bank' credits for watching ads. The ASq is an ad selection model which one our first two U.S. Pool lanes; the Social component offered viewers choices based on what 'friends' had liked or suggested. Banner to Full Page provided additional brand information when consumers clicked on a standard-looking ad banner. Pre-roll with Overlay offered similar functionality but with the pre-roll video unit. The ReOrient Express unit required users to tilt or turn their tablets to get more brand content. Finally, the Rich Media Interstitial turned the standard interstitial unit into a more interactive and content-filled experience.

Fifteen unique executions of the six new and three benchmark ad models had to be built for iOS and Android. Respondents were shown the executions prior to the focus groups. Both iOS and Android versions were developed. While these were beta versions of the ads they needed to be fully functional in order to generate valid and authentic responses from consumers.

In order to get their reactions to the new ad formats, we gave instructions either to download an app or to go to a URL. In several cases, the ad models were web-based but looked like an app to the consumer. During the focus groups, each ad model was discussed at length. Key findings were as follows:

- Let me drive: Offer choice and control instead of forced experiences.
- More for me: Enable deeper interactions.
- Tablet-ize the experience: Leverage tablet-specific design and interactions.
- No guessing games: Make ads intuitive and simple.
- A matter of trust: Be credible and honest.
- Speak to me: Be personally and contextually relevant.

The full findings from the focus groups were reviewed with all Pool participants at our second in-person meeting. There was discussion on how these models could work across content types, what was required to scale them, and if they needed further research. Specifically, the group agreed that AdBank was a novel idea, but needed work to clearly convey the benefits as well as a robust back-end system for managing credits to be a viable solution. ASq/ASq Social was an option for tablets without the social element, which was roundly disliked; however, since previous Pool Lanes had already tested and proven the basic ad model's effectiveness for online, there was consensus in not testing it further on tablets. As for ReOrient Express, it was clear that the model was unique to tablets, but consumers found the tilting/turning experience was unexpected and too jarring. Accordingly, the group voted, and concluded that only three models should move forward into quantitative research: Banner to Full Page, Pre-roll with Overlay, and Rich Media Interstitial.

Phase Two: Quantitative Research

In this phase, 40 unique executions of the three ad models were rebuilt for iOS and Android devices based on consumer feedback in the qualitative research. The models and their benchmarks were then tested quantitatively through an online survey. Our goal was to gather an in-depth, statistical understanding of consumer captivation for each of the three models and their benchmarks. Survey respondents were exposed to a variety of ad model executions which were embedded within a beta website or an app on their tablets. Respondents were then asked to complete a 15-minute questionnaire on a PC.

Working with research partner Ipsos, respondents were recruited from a large, online sample of online panels, social networks, and reward and gaming sites to minimize bias. Qualifying respondents were regular users of iOS or Android tablets between the ages of 18 and 54. The average respondent was 36 years old, earned \$87,000 per year, and had a college degree – a profile that mirrored that of the average tablet user in the marketplace at that time.

Research challenges for this phase were similar to Phase One in terms of building the ad models with full functionality.

After collecting 2,119 surveys, which measured Ad Recall, Ad Impact and Ad Reactions, the results showed that consumers rated all new models higher on all metrics.

Figure 1: Quantitative Research Results: Aided Recall by Ad Model

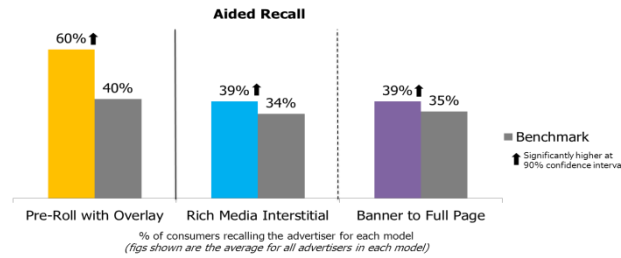
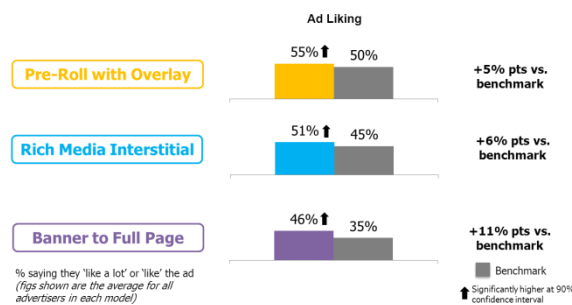
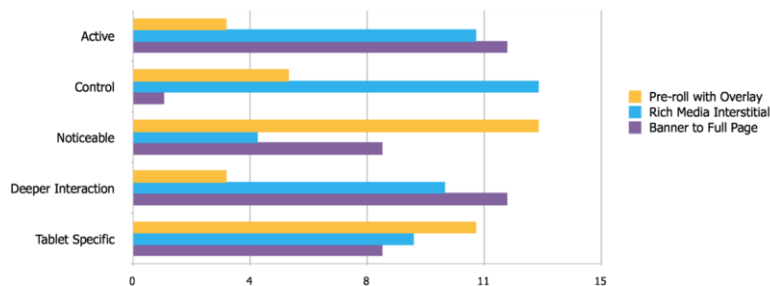


Figure 2: Quantitative Research Results: Ad Liking by Ad Model



A key, overarching learning in this phase was the importance of matching ad models to content. We found that it is vital to ensure branded content will engage users on their terms; ad models need to match the mindset of the user. Effectively, this finding meant that we would need to match Pre-roll with Overlay to video content, Rich Media Interstitial to print content, and Banner to Full Page to Web content.

Figure 3: Quantitative Research Results: Ad reactions: New Models vs. Benchmarks



Accordingly, when the group reconvened to review the quantitative results at our third meeting, it was determined that all three models should advance to the field trial.

Quantitative key findings echoed and enhanced those of the qualitative phase:

- Branding is essential, especially for ad recall.
- Integrate ads carefully with consumer content to minimize interruption.
- Use “tablet language.”
- Offer users opportunities to choose and control their experiences.
- Signal features and functions to encourage deeper interaction.
- Keep ads simple.

Phase Three: Field Trial Research

The goal of our field trial research was to collect behavioral and attitudinal data in-market to measure consumer interactions with the three new ad units and their respective benchmarks outside of a lab in the real world. For this phase, all ad models (Banner to Full Page, Pre-roll with Overlay, Rich Media Interstitial, and their respective benchmarks) were rebuilt one more time based on previous findings in order to run on Pool participants’ live media.

Seventy-four unique executions were built and served to 20 million tablet users across apps and browsers. All 74 placements ran on iOS and 10 placements ran on both Android and iOS. Over the course of the field trial, \$5 million dollars was spent on media, over 150 million impressions were served, and 42,000 surveys were collected.

Both behavioral and attitudinal research was undertaken in this phase, working with Medialets and Insight Express, respectively. We focused on six attitudinal and three behavioral metrics. The results revealed significant lifts in both types of responses. For behavioral, the new ad models generated noteworthy increases in the click-through rate for one of the models, and the engagement rate (meaning users had any kind of interaction with the ad unit) for two of the models. The survey findings proved that the new, more interactive ad units could produce significant increases in awareness, message association, and brand favorability. An additional analysis was done looking at the attitudinal responses among those consumers who had interacted with the ad units in some way. These ‘engagers’ showed even more impressive increases in response when compared to the unexposed control group.

Figure 4: Field Trial Results

Behavioral Metric	Banner			Pre-roll			Interstitial		
	Benchmark	Rich Media	Rich Lift over Bench Lift	Benchmark	Rich Media	Rich Lift over Bench Lift	Benchmark	Rich Media	Rich Lift over Bench Lift
Engagement Rate	1.5%	3.4%	+126.7%	14.9%	11.5%	-22.5%	6.0%	11.3%	+88.3%
Click-through Rate	1.7%	8.7%*	+411.8%*	N/A	1.0%	N/A	4.3%	3.3%	-23.3%
Time Spent (sec)	N/A	11.9	N/A	30.3	31.3	+3.3%	21.5	23.6	+9.8%

Attitudinal Metric	Banner				Pre-roll				Interstitial			
	Bench Lift over Control	Rich Media Lift over Control	Rich Lift over Bench Lift	Engager Lift over Bench Lift	Bench Lift over Control	Rich Media Lift over Control	Rich Lift over Bench Lift	Engager Lift over Bench Lift	Bench Lift over Control	Rich Media Lift over Control	Rich Lift over Bench Lift	Engager Lift over Bench Lift
Unaided Awareness	27%	64%	137%	219%	47%	60%	28%	78%	60%	90%	50%	48%
Aided Awareness	--	3%	--	264%	5%	5%	--	30%	8%	11%	38%	38%
Mobile Ad Awareness	173%	380%	120%	135%	440%	500%	14%	30%	800%	800%	--	14%
Message Association	55%	114%	107%	50%	64%	79%	23%	44%	111%	126%	14%	50%
Brand Favorability	15%	35%	133%	154%	16%	19%	19%	114%	48%	55%	15%	42%
Purchase Intent	9%	29%	222%	120%	12%	12%	--	66%	65%	71%	9%	45%
	14 Campaigns				10 Campaigns				10 Campaigns			

All in all, the Pool successfully identified what consumers want in tablet ads, and produced three new ad units that deliver on their needs. We are now working on scaling these units for the whole industry.

Challenges in Conducting the Research

From the beginning, the challenges of conducting research on an emerging media platform became evident. For the qualitative phase, instructing respondents how to download their ‘homework’ turned out to be a challenging first step. They sometimes needed to complete a multi-step process of going to a URL, downloading a beta app, and finding the right content, before they could actually view the ads. Accordingly, several respondents showed up at the groups saying they had been unable to find the ads on their own and so they saw them for the first time during the groups.

When the research moved into the second phase (quantitative) a different set of challenges arose. The first was taken care of through the methodology selected. That is, consumers have a lower tolerance for surveys on tablets than on PCs. As a result, Ipsos recommended that respondents be recruited from online panels and asked to view content on their tablets but complete the survey online. This solution worked well, resulting in a healthy total sample of more than 2,100 completed surveys.

For these first two phases, it was essential to have ‘working’ versions of each ad model rather than simply showing screen shots or descriptions of how they were supposed to function. Our initial plan was for each publisher to build versions of the different ad models, after The Pool team had paired up each advertiser with 1 or 2 different publishers. This turned out to be

challenging, not only because publishers had various levels of resources available but also because we needed some consistency across versions of the same ad model. We solved the problem by enlisting the help of Medialets, a company that had been certified to deliver and measure technically advanced campaigns across the broadest distribution of premium mobile and tablet properties in the industry, so they assumed the role of ad model developer.

The issues were not over, however. Despite Medialets' experience, they (and the publishers involved) had to tailor sites or apps and the ads within them to be compatible with the specs of multiple devices, and two operating systems (iOS and Android); the multiple versions of each created delays. In some cases, the unfamiliarity with the large swath of device and OS specs led to problematic ad experiences or issues loading the ad. For example, in the quantitative study, we had to remove one of the ads from our analysis after finding that the video ad on one publisher's site was not loading properly, preventing respondents from being able to react to it.

The first challenge we faced with the field trial phase was in dealing with Apple, because anything requiring an app update (or a new app) will also require Apple's approval. Unlike the Android or traditional web environments, Apple requires all updates and new apps to be submitted to its review process which can add considerable extra time to the process. One way to avoid these delays is to undertake the research using third party apps like Adobe App Viewer which allows for previewing an app without actually releasing it to the public. Other alternatives include internal enterprise apps already approved by Apple, websites made to look like apps, or having consumers go to gated areas of existing consumer-facing apps.

Another challenge we faced in the field trial, which is common in this type of research, was the recruitment of a sufficient sample across all of the sites participating. It was not clear why some properties were able to easily recruit a large number of respondents while others had considerable difficulty doing so. Fortunately, due to the highly collaborative nature of the project, publishers were willing to provide sometimes significant levels of bonus inventory to recruit enough people for the Control (non-exposed) respondents.

In terms of our field trial analysis, we wanted to ensure we were avoiding bias caused by the fact that different sites in the study ran different ad models, with no site running all of them. That is, when the data sets were aggregated, the sites in each ad model group were different. VivaKi had to determine which models were a logical fit for the media properties to minimize any potential bias and create a set of scenarios that would be similar to the real world environment. Thus, each participating publisher ran one standard benchmark version of each ad model along with one new version, to allow for proper calibration of the results.

Our field trial had very ambitious measurement goals. One of them was to understand the impact of interaction with the advertising on attitudes and perceptions towards the various advertisers' brands. There were many ways in which a tablet user could interact, including clicking on the ad or hovering over it to launch additional information or games or video within the advertisements. Medialets developed a series of macros to track interaction which essentially created a data file with tracking codes that was shared with Insight Express in order to measure the changes in attitudes and perceptions. After initially testing the macros and concluding that they were working properly, the campaigns launched and the research portion of the study commenced simultaneously. Unfortunately, after the research had been in field for some time, it was found that the data macros were flawed, which limited the extent of the analysis on engagement and interaction. The lesson from this was that we should have allocated more time upfront to test the efficacy of the macros prior to launch.

In summary, while many of the challenges we faced were common to other types of digital media effectiveness studies, others were unique to the tablet space. We were able to overcome nearly all of them, and learned many lessons throughout the process that helped us invent, or reinvent methods and approaches to solve the problems that arose. Our 14-month upstream swim was exciting, energizing, and thought-provoking, providing us with successful new ad models that will benefit advertisers, publishers and consumers.