Title of project: Digital Attribution In a privacy driven world
Companies and partners involved: A Danish fitness chain (Client) Hearts & Science (Media Agency) Annalect (Analytics)
Research budget: 50k or less
Awards

- Cross-Media Measurement – Gold
- Data Effectiveness – Gold
- Research Innovation - Silver

Project Summary

The client which is by far one of the leading brands in Denmark uses a wide variety of “programs”, to make sure that their marketing is effective. A broad mix of online and offline media channels to acquire new customers, with sales both being online and in the Centres. In digital, the number of active platforms, channels, formats and buying strategies has grown dramatically throughout the years, and with so many possible combinations, it is important to know which ones are “working out”. With cookies crumbling away, the number of self-reporting marketing silos growing and new stricter cookie consent rules, digital attribution is, at best, able to map 50% of the total effect; mostly those who click on the advertising measured in said self-reporting platform disregarding any other marketing activity and offline sales. In short: we wanted to find a cure for the rapidly progressing Attribution Myopia of digital marketing. We challenged the existing market solutions by building one of the most advanced cookie-independent, privacy-friendly digital attribution setups in the world. Removing issues with walled garden data, using advanced machine learning algorithms to isolate media performance from seasonality, weather, simultaneous offline media activity.

Objectives

Together with our client, we wanted to re-evaluate and understand the effectiveness of digital platforms/channels/formats – all the way down to the most granular line-item level, while making sure that effects from walled gardens, TV, seasonality and pricing were included in the attribution. They needed a solution that could attribute effect fast enough to act “in-campaign”, offering both holistic and granular views yet simple enough to be accessed via a dashboard and it had to be delivered at a very competitive (and fit) price. For this we needed to re-invent attribution modelling, making it leaner and much more automated.

Methodology

This new generation of attribution modelling is made possible by advances in cloud computing, APIs, and raw ML processing power. The method allows for a new level of automation, using assisted machine learning to replace previous manual processes. It is an advanced statistical model framework linked to a custom-built machine learning algorithm, utilising the existing Annalect Media evaluation platform. The system runs multiple transformations to find the most accurate fit for explaining the KPI. The model has 20,000+ different parameters available. Running through 1,000,000+ regression calculations continuously calibrating/optimising the accuracy of the attribution results, proving much more accurate, than existing cookie-based solutions.

Key Results

As all impressions, on all formats are being measured and explained, we have come to a much better understanding of what drives the (total) sales. Some of our learnings:

- Retargeting is much less effective, up to 30x overvalued on some channels
- Generic search performance is overstated up to 20x
- Video overall delivers good performance, but choosing the right format is very important
- Optimisation algorithms do not always do what the name says
- Platform performance varies throughout campaign period. Start with large formats, social throughout, video in the end.
- Allowing for natural regional differences, paid search total sales performance varies by region.

Impact and Application

The cross-media attribution results are compiled in a dynamically updated dashboard allowing for daily updates. Data can be used at all levels of the organisation. The solution makes the client able to act on campaign performance, and to change direction and/or communication in-flight. Everything is fine-tuned by critical client-feedback. For benchmark purposes comparisons to last-click attribution are available in-system, allowing for side-by-side comparisons, both working as a sanity check and to understand where last-click differs from the new method. Behind the methodology, there is a whole new and much stricter data governance process, with massive “policing” built into the system to ensure that campaign mapping on platforms/channels/formats always is consistent – down to line item level. As everything is campaign mapped, the effects of creatives are also captured allowing for a better understanding of what messaging works across all media platforms. The impact of getting messaging into a structured and holistic view (on walled gardens/platforms/channels/formats)-performance has been a redistribution of budgets to better performing areas. Less retargeting, branded search, more video and impact formats. As this is a research innovation, updates are continuously being done, errors fixed, patches made while the system is running. This is possible as the model is boot-strapped which also makes it easier to create model deep-dives (like exploring the synergy between media channels). The solution is scalable and can be adjusted to other business units/industries. An intelligent forecasting system is built on top of the platform. It connects historical campaigns with the option of re-running actual campaigns, testing for new optimised execution “scenarios”. The forecast tool also offers suggested optimal weekly spend levels per media/channel. The problem many digital attribution solutions have with matching ID’s across devices do not occur in this setup. Therefore, the results enable the client to find optimal media strategies for every device.