

Is digital advertising worth all the hype?

 By [Chris Brewer](#)

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I read an article recently where the reporter said, *inter alia* that, "internet advertising is up by 13% from 2015 to 2016," and it was based on information from a usually credible source...



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But I'm not so sure.

It seems to me that it's open season for just about anyone to make whatever claims they like – and back it up with assumptions like "according to WKRP, radio listenership is up" (you're probably too young to remember the programme WKRP – but you get my drift).

What's in a name?

Kory Kredit 10 Oct 2008



On the other hand, I asked a highly placed source what they thought, and the reply was: "I would actually be inclined to believe that digital has grown by 13% year-on-year, I think the digital space is the most unknown, confusing space and many large advertisers believe they must be in this space to succeed. I heard, for instance, that Mercedes Benz is spending about 50% of their ad budget in South Africa on digital and BMW is following suit."

Essentially, there are a lot of large clients throwing money at digital because it is the next "New Big" thing that you have to be "in". I think there's a strong element of FOMO here (Fear of missing out").

What's happened, especially in the digital space, is that many "surveys" have one main goal – to confuse.

For a clever salesman, with lots of big bullshit numbers, it is easy to convince a client that if you ain't on digital, you ain't gonna make it, especially when trying to reach millennials.

I'm not necessarily saying that the multitude of surveys available at the moment, across all media, are not to be trusted. But I do believe that many of those looking for the readership holy grail are bumbling around a bit.

I mean, we all know that research is wrong, don't we? It simply has to be – but that that's not the issue. The theory is that, providing you have a number (based on some logic or other) then, although it's essentially "wrong" the subsequent surveys, using the same criteria, can illustrate the **change** – and that's the important number.

*“ It's not that you started off with, say, 1,000,000 readers, that's irrelevant in the grander scheme of things. What is important is that if, the next year, your readership is, say, 1,100,000, then you can make a reasonable assumption that your readership has increased by 10% **no matter what the true number was to begin with.** ”*

It never fails to amaze me how few people in the industry can't seem to grasp that simple concept.

But digital is another animal completely. It's easy to get lost in "page impressions", "unique viewers", "click throughs", "session durations" and whatever other terminology they think they can impress us with.

The other thing, as an aside, is the quality and functionality of so many websites – many of whom seem to have only one objective, to make your visit as unhelpful as possible. But that's another subject for another time.

The bottom line is, in my opinion anyway, that nobody really knows what digital is and they can't draw meaningful conclusions because they're having serious problems in measuring it.

It's rather like Bitcoin, when you think about it. There are some who believe implicitly that it's the future and they're investing big time. But the majority are so unsure that they really don't know what to do – except miserably watch the price go up and up and up. Then, at the other end of the scale, there are the diehards who refuse to believe anything other than it's a scam.

All very confusing in a confusing world.

So, has digital increased 13% year-on-year?

Well, your guess is as good as mine.

ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: chris@brewers.co.za. Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: www.brewersdroop.co.za

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