

## Impressions Measure Reach, Not Results

I'm often asked to report impressions as a measure of marketing performance. When that request comes, I know it's time to explain what impressions actually measure and make sure that's what leadership is really trying to understand.

Impressions are a visibility signal. They indicate how often a message had the opportunity to be seen. They can tell you something about reach, distribution, and media efficiency. What they don't tell you is who saw the message or if marketing is working.

That distinction matters. Visibility is not the same thing as purposeful movement. A message can appear in front of thousands of people without changing what anyone thinks, does, or decides next. When impressions become the primary signal of performance, the system starts rewarding exposure everywhere instead of exposure to the right audience.

The shift is subtle at first. Campaigns get optimized to increase reach. Budgets move toward placements that produce the highest impression counts. Reports look stronger, and the numbers make it seem like marketing activity is expanding. What becomes harder to see is whether anything meaningful is actually changing.

Impressions can tell you that a message traveled. They can't tell you whether it landed. This is where organizations start confusing measurement with reassurance. Big numbers create the feeling that something important is happening, even when the signal those numbers provide is limited.

That doesn't mean impressions are useless. They can be helpful in context. They tell you something about distribution and visibility within a larger system of measurement. But when impressions become the headline metric, the system quietly shifts its focus. Teams start optimizing for what can be counted instead of what can be understood.

Marketing performance shouldn't be defined by how often a message appears. It's defined by whether that message moves audiences in the direction leadership intended.

Impressions measure reach.

Results require signal.