

# ARF REVEALS WORKING DEFINITION OF ENGAGEMENT

## In Moving from Buzzword to Industry Standard, It's a Start

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By [Matthew Creamer](#)

NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- Following months of trying to develop a new metric of ad effectiveness, the Advertising Research Foundation today unveiled a much awaited working definition of engagement with the hope of turning it from a buzzword to a industry-wide measurement standard.



Photo: Gerardo Mora

Joe Plummer

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Here's the definition as delivered by ARF Chief Research Officer Joe Plummer at the organization's annual conference: "Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding context."

### Short, sweet and sexy

It's short, sweet and maybe even a little sexy. But if you're unsure exactly how it will turn the media world on its head with regard to research, you could be forgiven.

While ARF in coming months will work to develop quantifiable measures of engagement and filed validation efforts, it's unclear just how the research group will get media buyers and sellers, long married to metrics that measure the number of eyeballs that see ads, to buy into a more consumer-centric conception of how ads work. Equally unclear is how long this process will take.

If questions remain about just how engagement will be implemented, there's little doubt about the need for new measurement system. Media fragmentation has made the marketing much more two-way, with consumers capable of engaging in dialogues through interactive media and content they themselves create.

### The problem with GRP analysis

Greg Smith, exec VP-media insights, planning and analysis at Aegis Group's Carat Fusion, said that gross rating points-based analysis not only doesn't show the full-picture, but it actually leads to certain kinds of marketing communications that aren't measured in its terms to sometimes get short shrift. Two examples he cited were search marketing and consumer-generated media.

The old measures, he said, "are worse than useless. They're exclusionary and misleading. There are many programs that don't see the light of day because they don't fit the old mold."

Engagement has been an industry buzzword since last July, when the ARF, along with American Association of Advertising Agencies and the Association of National Advertisers, kicked off an initiative to put it front and center in the research and measurement process. It's one of the many pieces of evidence that the proliferation of digital media is dramatically changing the marketing world and its processes.

### Not only about metrics

While few dispute the need to find something other than a reach-based metric, there were reminders that measurement isn't the only bar to getting smarter and more effective marketing communications.

One speaker, Madeline Hamill, managing director of Market Evaluator and a former Coca-Cola Co. executive, said there are many other challenges, including the ad-agency financial structure that makes them factories for 30-second spots and over-specialization that too often separates media ideas from creative thinking.

"Engagement is a great start," she said, "but we have to be realistic that it's the start of along journey."