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A Digital Marketer's Guide To Choosing A DSP

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KNOW YOUR “WHY”

The decision to move to a in-housing programmatic buying, and subsequent need to select a digital media platform that supports your current and future digital business, requires the involvement and input of top stakeholders and teammates alike.

The selection and implementation of a demand-side platform (DSP) is no small feat. At this point, you’ve probably identified a need for one, which means it’s time to consider other requirements, beyond the ability to buy programmatically, in order to support your growing organization and allow your team to **do more** down the road.

The only caveat to choosing a DSP—is that you need more than just a DSP. Use this guide as a resource to arm you with the necessary considerations needed to craft a well-thought-out Request for Information (RFI) or Request for Proposal (RFP) that will meet all of your current and future demands. Start by reviewing important questions needed to build your RFI.

BUILD YOUR RFI

QUESTIONS TO ASK
POTENTIAL VENDORS

BUSINESS

- 1 What year was your company established?
- 2 How many implementations have you conducted with this platform?
- 3 Please describe your cost markups in detail (i.e., media inventory, PMP fees, data costs, viewable metrics, ad serving, and/or service fees).
- 4 Are you GDPR compliant? How do you maintain data privacy?
- 5 Please describe your initial onboarding process, and ongoing training and education—as well as any associated costs.
- 6 What does customer support look like? Please describe your service level agreements (SLAs).
- 7 Does your platform store vendor information? If yes, is it maintained and updated regularly?
- 8 Is your platform integrated with any search and social platforms and/or ad servers? If yes—to what extent?

PROCESS

- ① What workflow capabilities do you offer to reduce manual or duplicate data entry?
- ② Does your platform provide inter- and intra- team messaging and communication tools? If so, does it store messaging history?
- ③ Can you build and send RFPs, negotiate with, or buy from media vendors directly within the platform via insertion orders (IOs) and/or private deals?
- ④ Are there planning tools that provide historical rate or performance data?
- ⑤ How is your inventory classified?
- ⑥ Can users be added and/or removed from specific accounts and/or campaigns? What types of user permissions and role settings does your platform accommodate? Please describe in detail.

TECHNOLOGY SUCCESS

- ① Do you offer bilateral ad-server integrations?
- ② Please provide details on how data is collected for targeting.
- ③ How does cross-device data match work and what is the data management process? How often is the data updated and refreshed?
- ④ What brand and ad fraud protection capabilities do you have?
- ⑤ Is your DSP proprietary or built on top of an existing API?
- ⑥ What are the next key areas for the platform's product development? What specific updates are in the product roadmap for the next three, six, and 12 months?
- ⑦ Are there any overflow buying services, if we need temporary managed services support?
- ⑧ Please describe your feature release cycle and subsequent customer communications.

BUYING

- ① Please describe which display inventory buying methods your platform supports (Site-direct, Open RTB, PMP).
- ② What type of data is available within the platform (first-, second-, or third-party data / location / cross-device), and how is it derived? Please describe all data targeting capabilities.
- ③ Does your platform offer any proprietary or differentiated data?
- ④ Please list out all data providers available in your platform.

Which formats are available programmatically
- ⑤ (mobile, tablet, CTV, etc.)?

How many daily impressions and ad exchanges do buyers
- ⑥ have access to? Please list all available exchanges.
- ⑦ How do you charge for using or layering data segments?
- ⑧ Does your platform utilize artificial intelligence (AI) such as machine learning or algorithmic optimization within campaigns? Please describe in detail.
- ⑨ How many PMP opportunities are available within your platform?

REPORTING + ANALYTICS

- ① What reporting metrics and insights are available within the analytics section of the platform across programmatic, site-direct, search and social?
- ② Are there any automatic alerts and notifications within your platform to flag under-performance?
- ③ What tools are available for sharing metrics and reporting with clients or internal stakeholders?
- ④ Does your platform offer additional business intelligence (BI) tools that provide media spend forecasting, team workload metrics, or revenue projections?

THE 10-STEP PURCHASING PROCESS

Developing a best-in-class evaluation for your organization starts with a solid plan that outlines the process. It should include a list of participating team members, vendor selection criteria, and specific areas that you're looking to improve.

Use this 10-step checklist to get started.

① **Select an Evaluation Team:**

Identify the cross-functional team that will be evaluating the potential platform options:

Frequently included team members:

- > CMO
- > Digital Marketing Strategist
- > Paid Acquisition Manager
- > Project Manager
- > IT Specialist
- > Marketing Analytics Manager

2 Perform a Self-Assessment

What technologies are you currently using? Are they meeting the needs of your team? Which digital channels should the platform support (direct, programmatic, search, social)?

3 Set Goals

Discuss, define, and establish set KPIs and metrics across all teams to ensure they align with overarching goals. Review a few examples below:

- > *Increase control and access to data sets across current and historical campaigns.*
- > *Improve the speed and capabilities to optimize and test ad units.*
- > *Increase the number of dollars going towards working media by 25%.*

4 Jump-start Vendor Research

Identify all business needs the platform will need to support and write out your short-list for evaluation. Think about what would bring you the greatest benefit—for example, a DSP, a workflow automation or ERP system, or perhaps, a solution to support holistic campaign reporting and analytics?

Reference online reviews or talk amongst peers—G2 is a great place to source feedback and user reviews across a broad set of ad tech platforms.

5 **Build Your RFI**

Gather as much information as possible in order to run a thorough assessment of multiple vendors for comparison and allow their answers to guide your final selection. Establishing a solid RFI or RFP based on your organization's current needs and desired future state will likely be the most critical part of the evaluation process.

6 **Plan Internal Presentations**

Review all RFI responses, and bring in the finalists for a deep-dive platform demo—stick to your top three vendors. This provides an opportunity to dig into their platform and gain more insight into their team and work culture. Nominate 'internal champions' to join these meetings, as they will eventually assist with internal platform on-boarding and adoption.

7 **Select a Vendor**

Look for a true industry leader and committed partner—someone who can help move your business forward for the long-haul.

Ensure that the contract includes a detailed breakdown of platform implementation, training, and ongoing account management needs.

8 **Define Solution Design and Scoping**

Review and discuss a detailed scoping of the desired outcomes of your new platform to align team members; make sure they understand the implementation process, costs, and timelines. If possible, assign a project manager to keep tasks and deadlines documented and organized.

9 **Finalize**

Wrap-up the commercial agreement with a vendor who is committed to a streamlined implementation process, ongoing education, and the success of your business.

10 **Celebrate!**

You have a new digital media partnership!

BUSINESS ALIGNMENT

Evaluate the solution beyond the teams that will be using the software every day—important business criteria should also be considered. Are you lacking a transparent view of campaign and vendor performance, or historical spend? Are you looking to increase visibility throughout planning, analysis, and billing? Look for a vendor that can provide back-up managed services in a pinch, just in case. Gather intelligence from all internal teams to determine how much money is spent on service fees annually—this will clarify how much room there is to increase dollars spent on working media, should you choose to eliminate third party service fees. Are there any immediate or future implementation risks that need to be discussed? The wrong partner could potentially make this transition a long, arduous, expensive process. Flush out these points in the vetting process, before the purchase is solidified—as successful implementation typically leads to faster adoption.

PROCESS AND PREPARATION

Depending on what you're looking to achieve, the integration of a digital media platform into your current strategy may serve dual roles: as an engine for campaign execution and a steward to innovations in your respective industry. When you're ready to evaluate internal process, think about the workflow of your team as it relates to planning, buying, and analytics. Is your current team stuck working in different silos? Instead of seeking out a platform that caters to existing processes or focuses solely on programmatic, determine where there are opportunities for improvement. Contemplate the desired future state of your organization. Ease of use (UX/UI), and design are important considerations, as they directly impact the daily operations of the team members using the platform. Can you envision a converged model across direct, programmatic, search, and social? Look for operational efficiencies and productivity gains which will increase team collaboration and effectiveness.

TECHNOLOGY SUCCESS

If you currently work with a DSP, look at what you like and dislike about the existing technology. If this is your first time digging into different DSP capabilities and options, many with very similar abilities and features—it may seem overwhelming at first. Start by evaluating the ability of available technologies to assist your team and business in planning, buying, organizing, and analyzing digital media campaigns.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Your brand needs a digital partner who can think beyond your present needs and help build for the future—someone who knows where digital advertising is going and has the technology to reflect it. The right partner will keep your brand and business moving forward the inevitable and continuous changes in the media and tech landscape, and ideally, have a dedicated team to support you along the way.

TRANSFORM YOUR
DIGITAL BUSINESS

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