Measurement Guide Series

# The DMA Guide to multi-touch attribution (MTA)

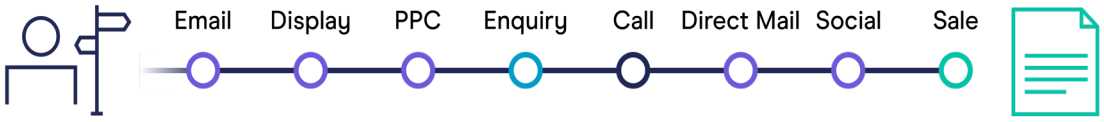
In partnership with UniFida

DMA Data & Marketing Association

# The DMA Guide to multi-touch attribution (MTA)

## What is it?

Customer journey-based attribution or multi-touch attribution (MTA) works by evaluating the contribution of each individual step leading up to a sale (or other target activity like making an enquiry), such as clicking through from an email or a social post or receiving a catalogue.




It attributes the value of the target event, such as a sale, across each of the steps that led up to it. The value of a campaign is then derived from the sum of the values of each of the journey steps it created that preceded a sale.

Typically, people take multiple steps before making a purchase, often both online and offline, and all of these should form part of the MTA attribution.

For MTA to be accurate it requires a statistical approach to scoring each step in a journey that properly reflects the extent to which each step contributed to the end result. In addition, the scoring needs to be transparent and objective, so it is beneficial if the attribution is undertaken by an organisation that is experienced in media measurement and has no ownership stake in the media that are being evaluated.

## Why us it?

Many organisations have reporting in channel siloes, e.g. direct mail through traditional campaign reporting. and Pay Per Click through Google Analytics.  This channel focused, rather than customer focussed, measurement approach means that sales can be double-counted, and campaigns and channels can get credit for activities that they did not drive without the help of other channels.

The end result is that reporting is often inaccurate, difficult to optimise and does not provide insight into how channels work together to secure sales.

Copyright / DMA (2025)

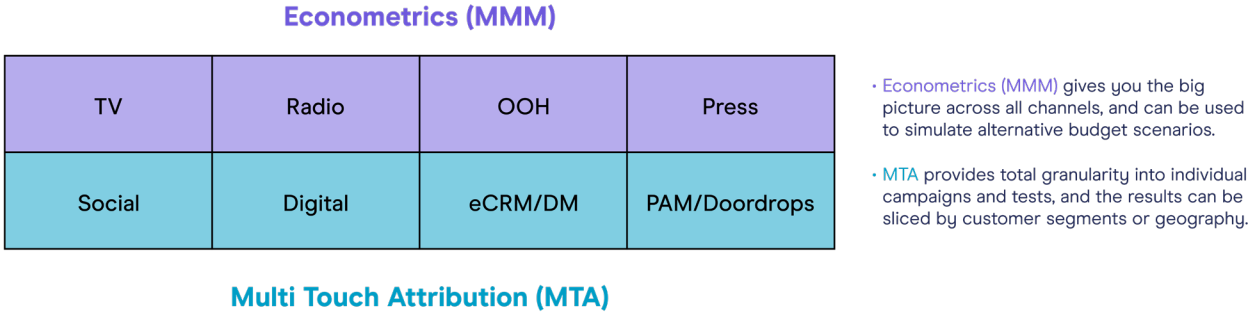
# When you should use it

MTA can be used wherever direct channels are being employed by marketers to achieve a customer action such as making a purchase.

Direct channels can include online like social, affiliates, email, Google Ads or Google Pay Per Click, as well as offline like direct mail, door drops, or call centre contacts.

It requires a cross-channel view to be taken of marketing effectiveness, and therefore the support of senior members of the marketing team.

Where there are indirect channels in play like TV or Press, then MTA can be used in conjunction with techniques like econometrics (MMM).




In order to build the customer journeys and score their contribution you require a technology platform that can link the journey data together, and then apply the scoring algorithms.

Given the resources required to organise and manage the data inputs, MTA will require a budget, and hence an organisation that is prepared to invest in measurement as well as media.

# How it works

## Data provision

A successful MTA reporting outcome occurs when the data flows into the MTA platform on a continuous basis, not necessarily close to real time, but at least daily or weekly. The data will come from your website, but also from multiple other sources such as an ecommerce system, an email service provider, an Enterprise Resource Planning system, a policy processing system, or a call centre. When offline marketing is involved, like direct mail or door drops, then feeds of those contacted when will be required. All data sources will need to be compliant with data protection legislation. Arranging the data feeds is often the slowest and most laborious part of setting up MTA.

Copyright / DMA (2025)

In addition, the marketeer will need to provide campaign costs so that Return on Marketing Investment (ROMI) can be calculated. These can be delivered at a campaign level, or alternatively sometimes by cost per channel per month.

## Configuring the platform

The assumption here is that there is technology developed to receive the data feeds, build the customer journeys, score the steps in each journey, and report the results at a channel or campaign level, and by customer segment.

Some organisations will want to build this themselves, but there are in existence several software as a service (SaaS) solutions that can be licensed, and which will deliver a result very much faster.

There is always some human intervention required to ensure that the data sources, and individual journey steps have been correctly classified into the channel and campaign from which they were derived.

## Scoring the journeys

Preceding each sale (or goal) there will be a number of steps that can range from one even up to twenty or more prior steps. A typical journey window used for collecting journey steps is 90 days prior to sale or goal, but this will vary by industry.

The platform you decide to use will need to have an algorithmic approach to giving a value to each of these steps based on their contribution. The algorithms will need to be trained to respond to the typical conversion journeys for your organisation and the algorithms may differ for different product journeys and customer groups, such as New versus Existing customers

## Calculating the value of the campaign or channel

The value of a step is its contribution to the sale (or goal) and this is a function of the value of the target event (e.g. $500) times the proportion of the value given to it by the scoring algorithm (e.g. 0.28, or 28%, as shown by Direct Mail in the journey below). In this example, Direct Mail is consequently given a value of $140 in a $500 sales journey.

The value of the campaign or channel in a time period is the sum of the values of each of the successful journey steps to which it has contributed (e.g. for the value of Direct Mail we add up all the values given to all the Direct Mail steps across all the journeys in that time window).

Share of sale value

| Step | Channel | Event Date | Time | Days to Conversion | Initialiser | Holder | Closer | Attributed Fraction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Direct Mail | 29/07/23 | 21:50 | 4 | 0.84 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.28 |
| 2 | SEO | 01/08/23 | 08:20 | 1 | 0.13 | 0.59 | 0.00 | 0.24 |
| 3 | Social | 01/08/23 | 22:52 | 1 | 0.00 | 0.41 | 0.45 | 0.29 |
| 4 | Email | 02/08/23 | 08:07 | 0 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.55 | 0.19 |
| | | | | TOTAL | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

e.g: If sale value is £500; direct mail share is...

Copyright / DMA (2025)

# What are the key deliverables?

| | Sales Value Allocation | | | | | Channel Collaboration | | | Sales Funnel | | | ROI | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Channel | Share of Value | Share of Value (%) | Share of Sales | Number of Sales Impacted | Average Order Value of Sales Impacted | Sales With Only This Media | Sales With This Media and One Other | Sales With This Media and Two or More Others | Initialiser | Holder | Closer | Cost | Cost per Sale | ROI |
| Affiliates | £ 30,496 | 1 % | 401 | 888 | £ 67,532 | 268 | 411 | 209 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.6 | £ 7,819 | £ 19.50 | 3.9 |
| Catalogue | £ 394,063 | 12 % | 5,179 | 7,969 | £ 606,350 | 2,496 | 4,715 | 758 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.3 | £ 50,521 | £ 9.75 | 7.8 |
| Direct Entry | £ 545,159 | 17 % | 7,165 | 6,748 | £ 513,431 | 6,743 | 5 | 0 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.5 | | | |
| Email | £ 510,969 | 16 % | 6,715 | 7,694 | £ 585,465 | 3,769 | 3,152 | 773 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.3 | £ 2,060 | £ 0.31 | 248.0 |
| Other Referrer | £ 34,914 | 1 % | 459 | 638 | £ 48,350 | 325 | 222 | 91 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.7 | £ 9,698 | £ 21.13 | 3.6 |
| Pay-Per-Click | £ 175,798 | 5 % | 2,310 | 4,060 | £ 308,978 | 1,808 | 1,648 | 604 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.5 | £ 24,760 | £ 10.72 | 7.1 |
| Search Engine | £ 1,220,552 | 38 % | 16,041 | 19,962 | £ 1,518,899 | 13,904 | 5,062 | 996 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.6 | £ 32,120 | £ 2.00 | 38.0 |
| Social | £ 5,153 | 0 % | 68 | 177 | £ 13,412 | 63 | 69 | 45 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.4 | £ 1,031 | £ 15.16 | 5.0 |
| No Event | £ 334,776 | 10 % | 4,400 | 4,605 | £ 350,373 | 4,605 | | | | | | | | |
| Total | £ 3,251,880 | 100 % | 42,738 | 52,741 | £ 4,012,971 | 33,981 | 15,284 | 3,476 | | | | £ 128,010 | £ 3.00 | 25.40 |

MTA reports can show a considerable level of detail regarding the contribution of each campaign or channel, for different customer segments. They can also show how many customer journeys are impacted by a campaign, and how channels interact with each other prior to a sale. They may also allow the export of customer journeys for detailed analysis.

The main key performance indicator (KPI) the reports provide will be the return on investment of a campaign or channel as derived from all its touchpoints.

# How to action the results

The results from MTA will be presented in reports like the example above.

There are three main ways in which the results can be used to make your marketing more effective and efficient:

- At a campaign level you will see the return each one is contributing in the context of all the other channels that are involved. This can be particularly valuable when online and offline channels are being used in conjunction with each other. As a result, you can decide which campaigns to prioritise and which ones to reduce or stop. If you are running a number of tests, or using control groups, you can see how each test is performing, or how customers in the control group compare in terms of value contributed with customers in contacted groups.
- At a channel level you can see the return on marketing investment (ROMI) that it is yielding. This of greatest use when you are allocating marketing budgets between campaigns. And by looking at ROMI when different amounts are being spent in a channel, you can form an opinion about the saturation effect on the results you get when you increase the spend or decrease it in a channel.
- And lastly you can understand the impact of seasonality; channels will perform differently at different times of year, and you can chart this from the MTA reports.

Copyright / DMA (2025)

# Case Study

Background: A large UK retailer with 200+ stores and a robust online presence lacked detailed insights into their marketing effectiveness beyond a basic 'sales over marketing-spend' ratio. They utilised various channels like TV, direct mail, affiliates, and social media. Following a successful pre-Christmas season, they needed to determine the impact of marketing on sales versus other causes.

The problem: With annual marketing budgets needing CEO approval by the end of January for a February board meeting, key questions were:

1. Should they increase overall marketing investment?
2. If yes, how much and in which channels?
3. When and where to allocate the budget effectively?

Our approach: We proposed implementing Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) alongside Multi-Touch Attribution (MTA), despite tight timelines. Data was finalised by early January, including over 1 million sales from the holiday season. MMM data was monthly, though we prefer weekly.

The results: The MMM indicated a 12.6 ROMI for marketing in 2023, with brand advertising at 7.6 ROMI. A 40% increase in brand spend could yield a 30% sales boost, highlighting growth potential. Brand marketing was particularly effective for new customer acquisition, outperforming direct and digital channels. MTA findings were positive for direct channels like email, door-drops, and direct mail, though social media underperformed. The saturation curve for direct channels suggested that increasing budgets would yield strong returns.

Next steps:  Analyse seasonality to optimise budget timing and leveraging MTA insights to pinpoint high-return campaigns.

Copyright / DMA (2025)

# Key checklist

When considering whether or not to embark on an MTA project you can use this checklist to determine whether your organisation and its marketing mix is suitable for this kind of measurement approach:

1. Do you use multiple direct channels for your marketing (the more you use the more important it will be to introduce MTA so that you can understand the inter-channel effects)?

2. Do you have a big enough marketing spend to make introducing MTA worthwhile (costs for MTA will vary but very broadly if you are spending £1m on media you can expect to spend at least 2.5% of it on measurement, but if your spend is greater than £10m the cost will drop to below 1%)?

3. Does your organisation really need MTA or is it already getting the measurement reports it needs (it's worth auditing the measurement reports that are currently coming in from agencies, Google Analytics etc to see whether they are fit for purpose, whether they are double-counting sales and whether they are independent and transparent)?

4. Do you have sufficient support from the Chief Marketing Officer or Chief Operating Officer for the project to ensure that it won't be derailed by vested interests (perhaps wanting to protect spend in a particular channel)?

5. Can you identify internal or external resources to deliver the MTA platform you need, with capabilities for building the customer journeys, scoring and reporting built into it?

# About UniFida

UniFida is a London based marketing technology and data science company that serves both end clients and agencies. The company's first martech product was a CDP, and this opened the door to developing a related platform for multi-touch attribution (MTA). The reason being that to deliver MTA it's necessary to join customers' journeys across multiple channels, both online and offline, prior to a sale.

We pride ourselves on being much more than martech platform providers; we take time to understand the complexity of our clients' marketing, we configure our technology and train its algorithms for their specific marketing mix, and we interpret the results and advise on marketing strategies to adopt as a result of insights gained from the attribution and marketing mix modelling. We now serve clients across multiple sectors including retail, travel, media, insurance, lotteries, charities and cruising.

For a longer read about marketing attribution please download our free ebook on the subject using this link:

https://unifida.co.uk/marketing-attribution-ebook/

Copyright / DMA (2025)