



# Podcast Measurement Compliance Certification

Measurement Guidelines Compliance Certification Guide

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# Executive Summary

The Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines are the result of the Podcast Technical Working Group's efforts to provide clarity in the marketplace by developing a common language around measurement. The document provides an introduction to tracking ad delivery in a podcast and attempts to provide clarity in the marketplace by describing best practices for measuring downloads, audience size, and ad delivery.

Podcasts are downloaded to a device for later listening or through progressive download listening. In most cases, the podcast file and any ads included with it are downloaded to a device that doesn't, or can't, send data about the consumption of the podcast and ads. This lack of data beyond ad delivery limits real-time measurement.

Because the medium, distribution, and platforms used to collect and listen to podcasts are built around the habit of downloading the file tracking content in this time-shifted medium involves filtering server logs to produce meaningful data for measurement. Since podcast technical teams analyze server logs differently, results vary across the industry.

The guidelines were created to list out the most important areas that cause divergence, and to provide direction or a baseline that everyone starts from. This list includes basic concepts like ad metric definitions, file size thresholds, consistently eliminating bots & pre-load requests and ensuring that ID3 headers are factored in when counting partial downloads. Also included are more complicated topics like time window sizes and other recommendations to filter out duplicate requests.

The working group recognized that while individual implementations will still be different, there is value in having guidelines, and a certification process that would test and validate the implementations to check whether they are following the baseline defined in the guidelines. The certification program outlined in this document is voluntary and serves to ensure that your implementation is compatible with the Podcast Measurement Guidelines.

This guide describes the requirements and process of the Podcast Technical Measurement Guidelines Compliance Certification

The Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines are developed and managed by the [Podcast Technical Working Group](#)

## Change Log

Revision	Description	Author	Date
Version 1.0	Document created, First draft for GA Release	Amit Shetty ( <a href="mailto:amit@iabtechlab.com">amit@iabtechlab.com</a> )	9/6/2016
Version 2.0	Improved content metrics definitions, introduces improved process for accurately capturing metrics	Amit Shetty ( <a href="mailto:amit@iabtechlab.com">amit@iabtechlab.com</a> )	12/20/2017
Version 2.1 initial draft	Added guidance for user agent structure, IPv6 recommendations, additional podcast player recommendations	Mike Midden ( <a href="mailto:mike@iabtechlab.com">mike@iabtechlab.com</a> )	11/2/2020
Version 2.1 updated	Language edits such as typo corrections and replacement of whitelist/blacklist terminology. Updated data for the Podcast Player Market Share section. Improved IPv6 metric calculation methodology.	Mike Midden ( <a href="mailto:mike@iabtechlab.com">mike@iabtechlab.com</a> )	1/11/2021
Version 2.2 updated	Updated for yearly cadence. Minor cleanup	Jarrett Wold ( <a href="mailto:jarrett@iabtechlab.com">jarrett@iabtechlab.com</a> )	10/11/2022
Version 2.2 Updated	Added filtering guidance to account for Apple Watch downloads	Katie Stroud ( <a href="mailto:katie@iabtechlab.com">katie@iabtechlab.com</a> )	5/24/2023
Version 2.3	Updates to account for release of PTMG v2.2	Katie Stroud ( <a href="mailto:katie@iabtechlab.com">katie@iabtechlab.com</a> )	3/29/2024

# Certification Process

The Podcast Measurement Guidelines Compliance program is voluntary and certifies an organization's (Company) adherence to the [IAB Podcast Measurement Technical Guidelines](#) which is done through an in-depth multistep audit of individual implementations. The [IAB Tech Lab](#) engages third party auditors for this compliance program and the process is an iterative one, meaning it is generally not a pass or fail. We work with you to perform a review against the requirements, identify gaps, fix them, and move forward. This takes about 60 days.

The certification involves the following process:

- **Kickoff Call:** It starts with a kickoff call where a certification checklist is provided to the company getting certified. This checklist is based on the guidelines and is a list of all the areas of concern and directions described in the guidelines. The auditors will review the checklist, and have a discussion with the company about their platform's architecture. The goal is to identify the next steps and also identify potential areas of concern for their implementation early on.
- **Company Response:** Next, the company is given time to respond to the checklist in detail. They are required to provide responses to each Podcast Metric and what their implementation does for that area.
- **Auditor Review:** The auditors use these responses to go into an in-depth review of the technical architecture and operational processes followed by the podcast company.
  - This is the bulk of the certification process and is an iterative process that includes a mix of code reviews, test runs and interviews, meant to validate the auditor's understanding of the implementation as well as to identify any potential issues. If any issues are identified, the company is given the opportunity to fix the issues on their platform and re-test.

- The goal is to provide every opportunity for the company to get aligned with the guidelines and reach certification successfully, which is the reason they do it in iterations.
  
- **Closing:** Once the auditors and the company being certified agree that there are no more issues open that the company intends to address, the certification is considered completed.
  - The certified companies get a seal of compliance that they can post on their website, and they also get listed on our website at - <https://iabtechlab.com/compliance-programs/compliant-companies/>
  - We also publish a public report documenting each of the guidelines and mark which ones you support or not.

## Application

To apply for certification, an organization must have implemented the [Podcast Measurement Guidelines](#) in their platform. If the organization is ready to begin the process or for general inquiries, they may email [compliance@iabtechlab.com](mailto:compliance@iabtechlab.com).

## Certification Fees

As of October 2022, there is an annual fee that covers the compliance audit process and will be tied to the most recent version of the Podcast Measurement Guidelines. You can check for pricing specifics for your organization by reaching out to [compliance@iabtechlab.com](mailto:compliance@iabtechlab.com).

### Qualification

Any podcast platform that uses or distributes server-side measurement reporting (*i.e. downloads, listeners, ad plays, and ad delivery*) is eligible to apply for compliance. It is not required to be an IAB Tech Lab member to become an integration partner.

### Geographic Applicability of Certification

Podcast Measurement Guideline certification is a global program and applies to all geographic regions.

### Certification Testing

An IAB Tech Lab approved independent third party auditing firm is employed to perform the validation of a company's platform for compliance with the Podcast Measurement Guidelines.

The scope of validation testing covers the following:

**1. Platform Overview:**

- Review of the overall system architecture of the platform.
- Review of the company org structure as relates to online ad delivery.
- Walkthrough of advertiser, campaign, and insertion setup process.
- Review of publisher (inventory) application, approval and set-up process, if applicable.
- Log file collection, data validation and aggregation processes and controls.

**2. Filtering:**

- Eliminate Pre-Load Requests (at least one of two solutions).
  - Policy put in place to prevent pre-loading in players and on websites (e.g. preload=none for HTML5).

- Use a download threshold based on one minute of content, excluding any data used for headers or other information, to determine if request was for a play/download or for pre-loading
- Eliminate Potential Bots and Bogus Requests.
  - IP threat filtering
  - Domain threat filtering
  - User Agent filtering
  - 2 byte range filtering
  - Automatically triggered downloads (i.e. Apple Watch OS)
- Handling HTTP Requests.
  - HEAD requests - these should not be counted because this is typically used to check for changes because no data is transferred in a HEAD request.
  - GET requests:
    - 200 (ok response) should be counted
    - 206 (partial response) A partial request should only be counted if the download covers the 1-minute rule, and de-duplication based on IP Address/UA is being done to cover cases where the user might be skipping ahead. Determining whether the requests cover the 1-minute requirement might require reassembling of the requests.
    - 304 (not modified response) -> signal that user has existing file and wants to see if it changed.
  - Platform-specific quirks - codes such as 000 or any of the above used to describe results that vary from typical definition (like a 206 to indicate request ended early). These requests can only be counted if they pass all measurement filters.



### 3. Apply File Threshold Levels

- To count as a valid download, the header information plus enough of the podcast content to play for 1 minute should have been downloaded.
- If the podcast is too small or if it isn't possible to compute the file and ID3 sizes regularly, complete file downloads (100% of the file, including the ID3 tag) should be used.

### 4. Identify and Aggregate Uniques:

- Identifying Uniques for Downloads & Users (*the details of the filtering methods should be kept transparent*):
  - Filtering using IP address + User Agent — *The following method is recommended.*
    - A combination of IP Address and UA is used to identify unique users and downloads. For example, if the same file is downloaded 10 times by 6 user agents behind one IP address, that would count as 6 users and 6 downloads.
  - Other methods may be used to identify unique users. Alternate methodologies must be reviewed and approved.
- Play-Pause-Play Scenarios
  - If a unique download is divided into multiple file requests, for example if a user plays the first half of an episode using a website audio player, clicks pause, and then resumes a half-hour later, then that should still be counted as one unique download. Care should be taken to not count these as multiple downloads/users.

### 5. Generate Metrics :

- Podcast Content Metric Definitions
  - Download: A unique file request that was downloaded. This includes complete file downloads as well as partial downloads in accordance with the rules described earlier

- Listener: data that represents a single user who downloads content (for immediate or delayed consumption). Listeners may be represented by a combination of IP address and User Agent as described earlier. The listeners must be specified within a stated time frame (day, week, month, etc.).
- Podcast Ad Metric Definitions
  - Ad Delivered: an ad that was delivered as determined by server logs that show either all bytes of the ad file were sent or the bytes representing the portion of the podcast file containing the ad file was downloaded. This metric is only valid if the download was valid. As a best practice, this metric should only be pulled from valid downloads.
  - Client-Confirmed Ad Play: counts an ad that was able to prompt a tracking beacon from the client when the file was played. Whenever possible, the metric should include information about how much of the ad was played using the markers: ad start, first quartile (25%), midpoint (50%), third quartile (75%), and complete (100%).
- High Level Metrics
  - The Content and Ad metrics described above should also be made available at 3 levels – publisher / show / episode.

## **6. Podcast Player Recommendations**

- Do not implement auto-play except where listener intent is implied. For example, if a listener initiates play for an episode in their podcast player, the expectation is that the next episode will auto-play when the selected episode is complete. In contrast when a set-up that initiates auto-play upon a page visit or opening an app without any other actions to indicate intent, the result is a bad experience for the listener and inflates measurement metrics to include unwanted audio play.
- Do not preload podcast episodes unless the intent was clearly to play the podcast.

- Use header information located at the start of the podcast to prevent a full download when not needed.
- For a full download, ask for the entire file at once. For a progressive download, ask for the file in slices at a byte range that is more than 2 bytes at a time. This way a full download can be distinguished from a progressive download.
- Do not modify the enclosure URL when requesting media or add extra parameters.
- Do not cache podcast episodes on your servers. Always download the latest episode from the enclosure URL for every app listener initiating a download.
- Use the GUID—as opposed to episode URL, title, publication date, etc.—to identify new episodes in the RSS feed that should be automatically downloaded to a listener’s device. The GUID is designed to be persistent regardless of changes to hosting environments, titles, or other details.
- Employ an “automatic download unsubscribe” behavior. For example, after a number of inactive downloads (episodes never played), stop auto downloading additional episodes.
- Do not automatically download all episodes (e.g. back catalog episodes) by default. This behavior creates unnecessary drain on the publishers’ servers as well as consuming listeners’ bandwidth. It also creates a spike in downloads on server logs that require resources for troubleshooting the spike, explaining it, and addressing it.

- Provide enough details in the user-agent header to allow it to be consistently differentiated from the user agent of other devices. See “User Agent Structure” below.

### 7. Valid User Agent Structure (optional)

- Provide enough details in the user-agent header to allow it to be consistently differentiated from the user agent of other devices.
- Recommended that platforms be conservative in adding unnecessary information to the user-agent string, and in encoding practices.
- Recommend that platforms submit their user-agent header value to the IAB Spiders and Bots inclusion list so that it is not considered a bot and can be a signal used to determine the device information. If the app or platform does employ the use of bots to index content, it is recommended to specify a user-agent that is distinct from the application user-agent and includes the word “bot” to clearly identify its use case.
- Recommended use of the following pattern to build the user-agent in order to provide a consistent structure for all parties who consume the details:

**<app name>/<app version><device info> <os name>/<os version><other info>**

For example:

**AppName/1.2.3 DeviceBrand DeviceModel OSName/1.2.3 LibName/1.2.3**

### 8. Accounting for Changes in Technology

- Have practices in place to account for mass market technology changes in their measurement reports. Such practices might include setting reasonable data thresholds to trigger warnings about anomalies in the data, a course of action to address instances when anomalous data occurs, or a subscription to common development sites that report known issues or updates.

### 9. Transparency

Keep a Document of Methodology (DOM) to share with relevant parties on methodology that might impact counts. At minimum, the DOM should include the following:

- **Measurement window:** Indicate whether the type of time window used for counting is static or rolling.
- **Self-audit:** Record self-audit completion and any findings at least twice a year. Annual recertification may count toward self-audit record.
- **Uniques:** The methods and metadata used for identifying uniques
- **Handling IPv4/IPv6:** The methodology for hashing and/or truncating IPv4 and/or IPv6 addresses
- **Inclusion list:** Record re-validation of inclusion lists at least every 90 days.

### Publication of Certification

Upon successful completion of the certification testing process and approval of certification, the company is issued the Podcast Measurement certificate and IAB Tech Lab compliance seal. They can use the seal to publicly communicate their Podcast Measurement certification. The certifying partner, date certified and status will be added to the IAB Tech Lab Transparency Center's compliance data set (Podcast Compliance API) to provide information about the certification. In addition, IAB Tech Lab will also list the companies who have been issued certification on our website here: <https://iabtechlab.com/compliant-companies/>

### Continued Certification

Companies who have achieved Podcast Measurement certification are responsible for maintaining the integrity of their certification. They must recertify when there are significant technology changes made to their podcast hosting and measurement systems, or they upgrade to include new features of podcast guidelines. For continued use of the seal and certificate, a company must submit for certification at least once in the past 12 months. This is to ensure the integrity of their implementation and to ensure trust in the industry.

### Recertification

Upon completion of the first engagement, an annual re-engagement date will be set. To maintain continuous certification status for Podcast Measurement Guidelines, companies must recertify when:

1. Platform is on an older version than the current published guidelines, then update to the latest version to validate the proper adoption of the latest guideline requirements.
  - a. A company's platform should be on the latest version given reasonable allowance.
  - b. Can be (-1) major version behind (excluding 2.0 -> 2.1 as that was considered a major release)
2. Twelve (12) months have passed since the last certification test, even if partner has not made any changes to the integration. The certified partner must continue to ensure the platform adheres to the current guidelines in place and is validated for continued compliance within the guidelines at least once every 12 months. IAB Tech Lab will make all efforts to notify the integration partner in advance of the 12-month deadline.
  - a. If the integration partner cannot be certified within 12 months, then the status will be changed to 'expired'. Once the recertification is completed, the status will be changed to 'active'.
  - b. During the expired status, companies may define their own policy on whether to treat the data received from the expired partner as certified or not and for how long.
  - c. Some flexibility will be allowed on a case-by-case basis.
    - o For example, if a renewal comes up in July and the latest release was in June and a company wants to upgrade to the latest version in August, then IAB Tech Lab may allow we can have some flexibility on the certifying date.

### Certification Status

The IAB Tech Lab maintains certification status based on specific criteria. Partners achieving success in the certification process are categorized as "Active," while those with expired certifications require recertification. In instances of non-compliance with standards, partners may be placed under "Suspended" status, necessitating a thorough review of the program guidelines and re-audit to rectify any issues. IAB Tech Lab will continue listing the suspended versions as well as active versions with the certified date. This will allow companies using that data to make a determination on how to interpret and use the certification status of an integration partner (see statuses below).

**Active:** Partner has completed successful certification.

**Expired:** Partner has not recertified or engaged in re-certifying.

**Suspended:** Partner is not currently compliant with the standard.