

The questions to ask before you sign off next year's budget.

Most budgets rest on measurement that will not survive scrutiny. Before you commit next year's money, put your numbers through these nine questions. If a report cannot answer them, that is the thing to fix first, ahead of any channel or creative decision.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY REAL

- 1 What would have sold anyway?** Ask to see the base, the sales that arrive with zero media. If it is implausibly small, the model is handing your marketing credit it did not earn.
- 2 Does the number show what your spend caused, or just what happened alongside it?** Correlation dressed up as contribution is the most common, and most expensive, measurement error.

CAN YOU TRUST THE CREDIT

- 3 Does your model credit the last click, or the whole path?** Last-click rewards whoever closes and ignores whoever opened, so it quietly tells you to defund the work that builds demand.
- 4 Have you ever held a group back and compared?** A holdout is the cleanest proof of incrementality. When the model and the holdout agree, spend with confidence. When they disagree, your reporting was flattering you.

ARE YOU OPTIMISING THE RIGHT THING

- 5 Are you optimising for conversions, or for customers worth keeping?** Two customers won at the same cost, one churns in a month, one stays five years, are not the same customer. Weight for value, not volume.
- 6 Over what window are you judging success?** Short windows flatter the channels near the purchase and punish the ones that create demand months earlier.

IS IT A TOOL OR A VERDICT

- 7 Can you open the model, change an assumption, and watch the answer move?** If not, it is not a model you can interrogate. It is a verdict you have to accept.
- 8 Do you own the reasoning and the tool, or rent a monthly number?** A black box you cannot question is a number you cannot defend in the room when it matters.
- 9 Was the method chosen for the question, or the habit?** Frequentist when data is plentiful, Bayesian when it is thin. Anyone who only ever uses one is choosing comfort over accuracy.

THE TEST UNDERNEATH THEM ALL

Does the number change a decision? If a measurement cannot move the budget, the media or the creative, it is decoration. Fix the measurement first, then optimise everything that depends on it.