White Paper
Serving Interactive Advertising through VAST

Dan Lovy
January 2016

Abstract

SIMC (Social and Interactive Media Consortium) is an industry group seeking to create a protocol that standardizes the broadcast of interactive media. One of the challenges this protocol seeks to address is the scalability of publishing interactive advertising. SIMC has produced a protocol specification (see DCAMP Specification and SIMC White Paper).

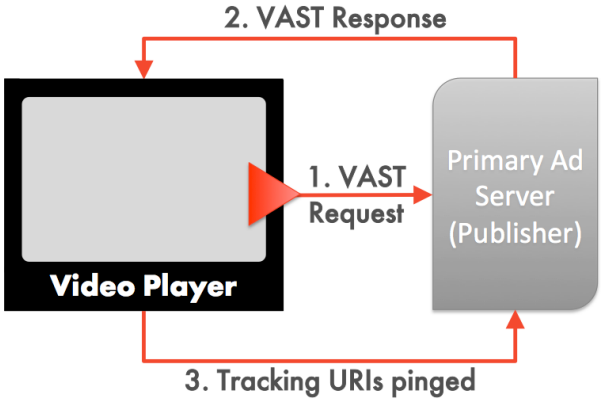
Issues raised in discussions with organizations that may potentially integrate the SIMC standard include integration costs, time and resources

This white paper focuses on a strategy to greatly lower the costs of integration by making use of the existing VAST protocol for video ad distribution.

VAST

The IAB Digital Ad Serving Template (VAST) provides a common protocol that enables ad servers to use a single ad response format across multiple publishers/video players. Simply put, this protocol allows digital video publishers to request and receive video advertisements that can be inserted into programming in a standard way. Publishers can then call multiple advertising sources for advertising content.

How It Works



When an internet based Video Player makes the decision to insert an advertisement, the following takes place;

1. VAST Request: This is a URL call to a 3rd party ad server.

2. VAST Response: The ad server returns with an XML response that contains all the information that the Video Player needs to display a video ad. This includes a URL to the video as well as control information.

3. Tracking URLs Pinged: The XML response will contain URLs that are called to signal that certain events have occurred. Events might include signals that the advertisement started or played to completion.

Here is a snippet from a VAST XML response

```
<TrackingEvents>
            <Tracking event="start">http://example.com/pixel.gif</Tracking>
            <Tracking event="complete">http://example.com/pixel.gif</Tracking>
</TrackingEvents>

<MediaFiles>
            <MediaFile type="video/mp4" bitrate="300" width="480" height="270">
                  http://example.com/uploads/myPrerollVideo.mp4
            </MediaFile>
</MediaFiles>
```

In this example the video to be played is specified by the <MediaFile> tag. Now, and this is important, that URL can point to static file on a server OR be a URL to video server that manages the delivery of the video content. An example would be an adaptive bitrate video server that manages the quality of the video depending on bandwidth.

Adding SIMC Interactivity Using VAST

By delivering a <MediaFile> URL that points to a SIMC interactive server, the interactivity can be completely managed by that external SIMC based server. The Video Player would still make a standard VAST call and would play back the <MediaFile> URL as it does now. All of the interactive issues; gathering phone or tablet input, synchronizing the user to the stream, switching what the view is seeing etc. would be handled external to the Video Player. The Video Player would only see a single stream as it does currently.

Now any infrastructure that uses VAST to request and insert video advertisements can add interactivity with little or no integration effort.

Contrast With VPAID

The IAB has defined a protocol to manage digital advertising interactivity called VPAID. VPAID is essentially an interactive VAST data payload. An advertiser can return code that can execute interactive experiences on Digital Players. This code has historically been Adobe FLASH. As FLASH has been falling out of favor and requires FLASH players to be deployed of set top boxes, Javascript has been growing in popularity for VPAID implementation.

The challenge for network operators is that VPAID still requires integration and management of the interactive elements on the client devices. On more web enabled devices, this can be straight forward. On less robust devices, this requires a great deal of work and is challenging to create an interface environment that is standard and compatible.

This solution has none of those requirements. As it is 100% server/cloud based it can be deployed with no client side integration code. It also guarantees a uniform user experience model across heterogeneous networks. An interactive ad experience running on ROKU box will be the same as running on a cable providers IP based set top box.

This is the same contrast with vendor specific SDKs that are often deployed to devices to add interactivity. These solution carry I much higher integration cost and locks the network into a single, non-standard ad provider.

VAST based advertising has become standard and is widely deployed. This strategy plugs into that network and provides an advertising distribution platform at scale. It removes a costly integration burden and creates a standard platform for interactive ad distribution.

For more information, visit www.simc.tv

Or email

Dan Lovy at dan@simc.tv