CORVIDAE
By QueryClick



A Beginner's Guide to Marketing Attribution

Corvidae.ai



It is a challenging time for marketers on the attribution front right now. With the pressure to prove the value of your marketing efforts front and centre.

And a combination of factors including the impending death of third-party cookies, the lingering impact of iOS14 and concerns around bias in social platform reporting have left many marketers asking where they go next in attribution terms.

So having a good grasp of attribution fundamentals is essential right now.

In this eBook, we aim to help you with that as we explore:

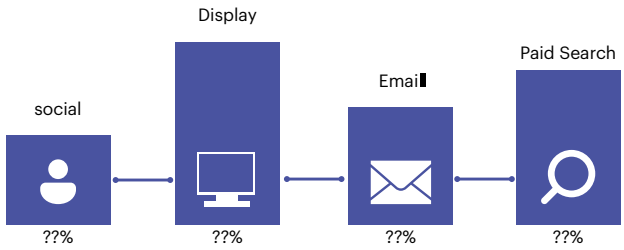
- → What marketing attribution actually is
- → Different types of attribution
- → What attribution models are
- → Some key marketing attribution challenges
- → Why there are challenges with Google Analytics right now
- → The likely impact of the removal of third-party cookies
- → A 6-point checklist for choosing the right attribution solution

If you're new to the world of attribution, you might want to keep our **attribution glossary** close by to learn some of the key terms you need to know.

What is marketing attribution?

Customer buying journeys are more complex than they have ever been. Involving a plethora of marketing touchpoints – from in-store promotion, to TV and display advertising and paid advertising on the web.

And all of these touchpoints are working together, right along the breadth of the customer journey to ultimately influence sales and conversion.



Marketing attribution is the discipline of effectively unravelling all of this complexity and identifying which marketing activities and channels are effective for you.

And then using that insight to refocus marketing spend and activity into the channels and media choices that are turning the dial in revenue and ROI terms for your brand. However, over **60% of marketers** think that the data to support effective cross-channel decision-making is broken.



Different types of attribution approaches

So, what type of attribution approaches are there?

That is a complex one to answer, but here is a very short history of marketing attribution that might help with context.



Media Mix Modelling

Media Mix Models (MMMs) go as far back as the 1950s. But rose to popularity in the 1980s.

They apply statistical techniques to attempt to find incrementality in large data sets using mathematical techniques. However, their popularity largely came down to the lack of alternatives available to marketers at the time. Many marketers still use MMMs for top-level media planning and budgeting. Mostly because they haven't yet made the transition to more modern ways of understanding their marketing mix.



Single and Multi-Touch Attribution

With MMMs failing digital marketers, new Single and Multi-touch attribution models were created including Last Click attribution which is the default attribution model in Google Analytics (GA).

These models filled gaps left by MMMs including the ability to measure in much greater detail. Therefore, enabling marketers to see more granular analysis of what is working for them - around targeting strategies, creative and time of day.

However, these methods fail to capture the value of many other factors that may have contributed to conversion. Or adequately quantify what might have happened in the absence of a specific marketing touchpoint.



Machine Learning and AI-Driven Attribution

It has become increasingly clear that the existing solutions above were failing to capture the impact of touchpoints across the entire customer journey. However, attribution platforms that are able to leverage Machine Leaning and AI processes are paving the way for a new era of attribution.

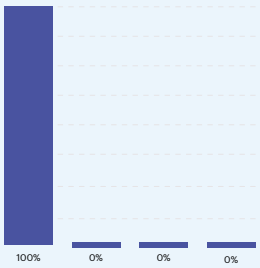
Standard attribution models rely on cookies and IDs to track touchpoints and do a particularly poor job of stitching together complex, multi device journeys that are becoming the norm. However, ML and AI-led approaches - like our own **Corvidae attribution solution** - allow for the rebuilding of raw, cross-channel analytics data to see a complete customer journey.

Having the right technology in place to deliver effective attribution is a key element of your marketing strategy.

However, your choice of **underlying attribution** model is the type of decision that can separate out winners and losers in the marketing attribution stakes. An attribution model is effectively a set of rules that helps you determine where and how you apply conversion credit to take account of marketing touchpoint impact across the customer journey.

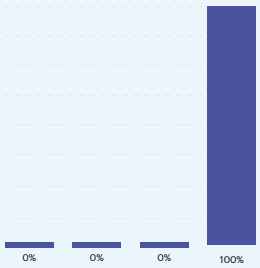
They come in different shapes and sizes – they key is finding the type of model that is matched to your own specific marketing challenges and needs.

Here is quick summary of some of the main types:



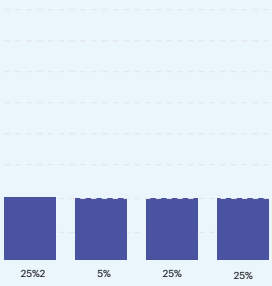
First-Click attribution

A single-touch model which allocates 100% of the credit for conversion to the first touchpoint in the customer journey and ignores the rest. This might suit you if you are in an early-stage marketing scenario where growth and scaling are the priority. But is less appropriate for complex buying journeys with extended buying cycles.



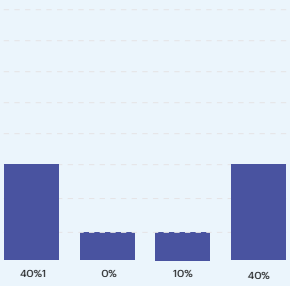
Last-Click attribution

Takes a similar approach to First-Click but reverses the emphasis by giving 100% credit to the **Last Click in the journey**. This is the default model in GA and could be relevant where conversion optimisation at the bottom end of the funnel is important. But, like Last-Click is an oversimplified analysis for longer customers journeys.



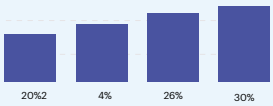
Linear attribution

The first of the multi-touch attribution models this approach applies equal credit to all contributing touchpoints. Could be useful if you are making a holistic assessment of the journey but won't give you the detail you need on specific channel and media as a result.



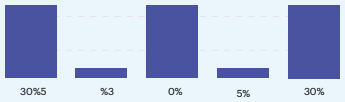
U-shaped attribution

Takes the view that touchpoints right at the beginning and at the very end of the journey have more conversion value at 40% each. With touchpoints in between being given an equal share of the remaining 20%. May be appropriate where you are looking to identify what drives acquisition or have a heavy focus on nurture.



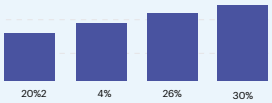
Time decay attribution

Favours touchpoints that are closer to conversion with additional credit. Might work well where you are looking to identify what drives conversion in the lower funnel but not appropriate for longer and more complex journeys where higher funnel activity is not significantly taken into account.



W-shaped

Really an adaptation of the U-shaped approach. This also includes a 30% weighting (in addition to 30% on first and last touchpoint) for the opportunity stage of the buyers journey. With 10% being shared by other touchpoints. May suit where you want to identify touchpoints that build audience, create leads and driven conversion. But if you are using GA and have an extend buying cycle over 90 days you might lose the data view you need



Custom attribution

In this approach you take a very personalised view of attribution which is heavily weighted towards your own specific marketing needs. This can work well where you need the flexibility to tailor your model but subjectivity in the weighting process can potentially skew your results and needs managing.



Some key marketing attribution challenges

So, all of that sounds ideal then?

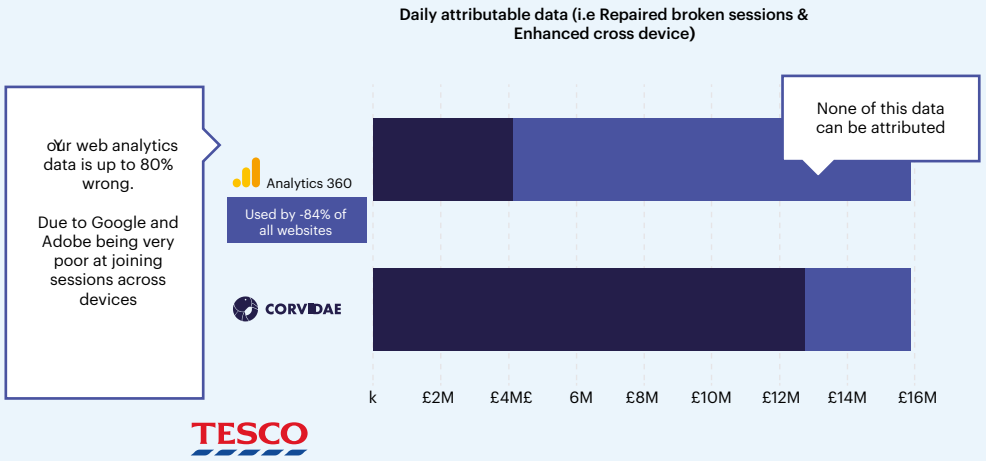
You pick the attribution model that best suits your needs and it delivers for you against your requirements.

Unfortunately, it isn't quite as straightforward as that and there are a number of key attribution challenges that marketers are grappling with right now.

The poor quality of underlying data being used for attribution

The simple truth is that the quality of your attribution model is only as good as the quality of the data that you are feeding into it.

And this is where our work with our clients has consistently shown issues. In fact, particularly for clients who are using Google Analytics (GA), we have consistently found that up to 8**0% of underlying analytics data** has been incorrectly attributed. And if the data you are using for attribution is so skewed you don't need to be an expert to know that this has a hugely detrimental effect on the quality of your attribution.



Source: **Corvidae attribution platform**

This is because GA relies on a cookie/pixel based approach which isn't particularly effective in stitching together complex cross-device and cross-channel journeys. Take the example above, which is for a real customer implementation for a leading UK retailer. In this case, we identified that up to 80% of the data being generated by Google Analytics (a solution which relies on cookies for attribution) was actually being incorrectly attributed.

And we were able to use the sophisticated AI and Machine Learning techniques in our Corvidae platform to rebuild the data – and to provide a much more accurate view of the impact of advertising spend.

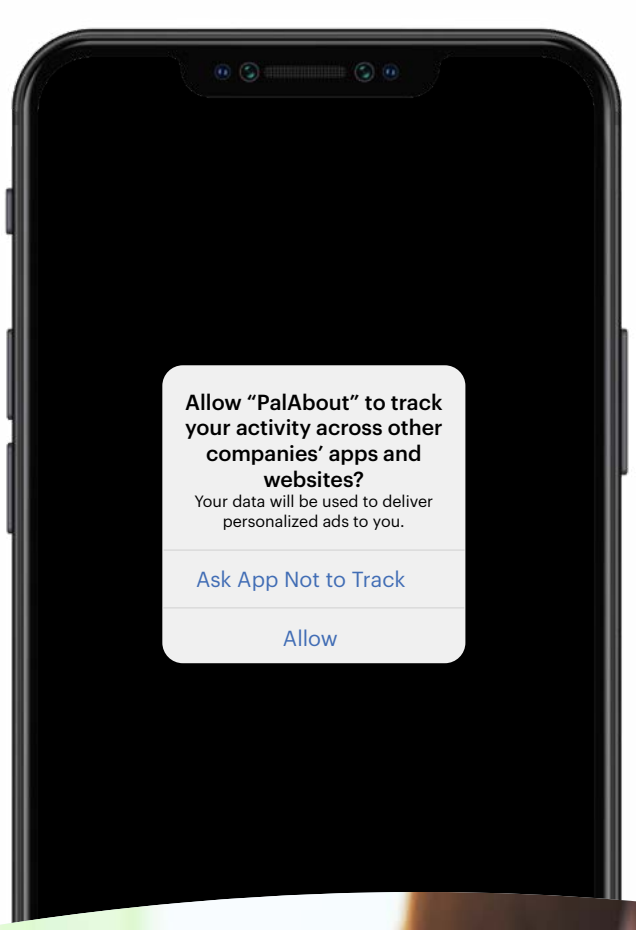
The impact of iOS14 changes on tracking

Back in 2021, against a backdrop of increasing clamour for user privacy, Apple took the decision to require users to **opt-in for tracking on apps on their iOS devices**.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, as opt-in levels have been low.

The knock-on effect of this has been a dramatic change to the type of data available to advertisers using the Facebook advertising channel with:

- → Facebook losing access to swathes of its analytics data as tracking capability was effectively switched off across a huge chunk of iOS devices
- → The change meaning that the tracking attribution window in the Facebook attribution model was reduced down to 7 days which has caused some fairly significant issues for brands and advertisers that are working with longer buying cycles
- → Facebook responding to the situation, and the data gap, by effectively modelling the performance of your ads based on a more limited data set – and crucially only based on data it can see inside the Meta Ecosystem. Which has huge implications for the quality of attribution reporting on the platform



And our **own research** points to the fact that 60% of marketers have seen a marked decline in the performance and effectiveness of paid ads since the iOS 14.5 update.



The need to overcome platform bias in attribution reporting

Despite some of the issues above advertisers are continuing to plough marketing funds into advertising platforms like Google, Facebook (Meta) and Amazon. In fact, according to figures from **emarketer** combined these 3 platforms account for an incredible 74% of digital advertising spend globally.

However, the problem for advertisers is trusting the measurement data that these big players are putting in front of them. Due, in part. To the walled garden approach they take to data sharing and reporting. In fact, research by **QueryClick** uncovered the fact that an astounding **80% of marketers are concerned about the issues of bias in AdTech reporting**. And as **Forbes point** out the problem has its roots in the fact that measurement from these players is giving a view on conversion from their perspective only and doesn't take into account the impact of journeys outside their ecosystem.

And our own data would appear to bear that out. Take the real word example below for one of our clients – online clothing retailer Quiz. They were struggling with who to trust when Facebook Analytics were reporting revenue of £450k for a specific campaign - while Google Analytics was showing only £20,000 attributable revenue for the same campaign (so 20x less).



The root of the issue? Some of the cookie/pixel tracking issues in GA highlighted earlier, combined with the narrow view of conversion being provided by Facebook reporting.

Fortunately, in this case, QueryClick was able to effectively rebuild the underlying data using our own Corvidae platform to establish the true revenue generation figure which was just under £250k.

An attribution view that simply wasn't possible in either GA or Facebook platform analytics.

Why Google Analytics has challenges of its own

We touched on the issue around poor quality data attribution in Google Analytics but in some ways it is only the tip of the iceberg for users of GA right now.

Leaving aside the decision to call time on third-party cookies – which we will dig into in the next section – Google itself is wrestling with a number of challenges including:





Illegality of Google Analytics in the EU

Google has suffered a number of high profile legal rulings in the EU which have **called into question the GDPR compliance of GA itself**. The issue centres around the fact that in the US, it is not possible for the analytics provider to guarantee that data will not be accessed by authorities in the US. And, as a result of that, it is therefore illegal – or not compliant – under the GDPR regulation.



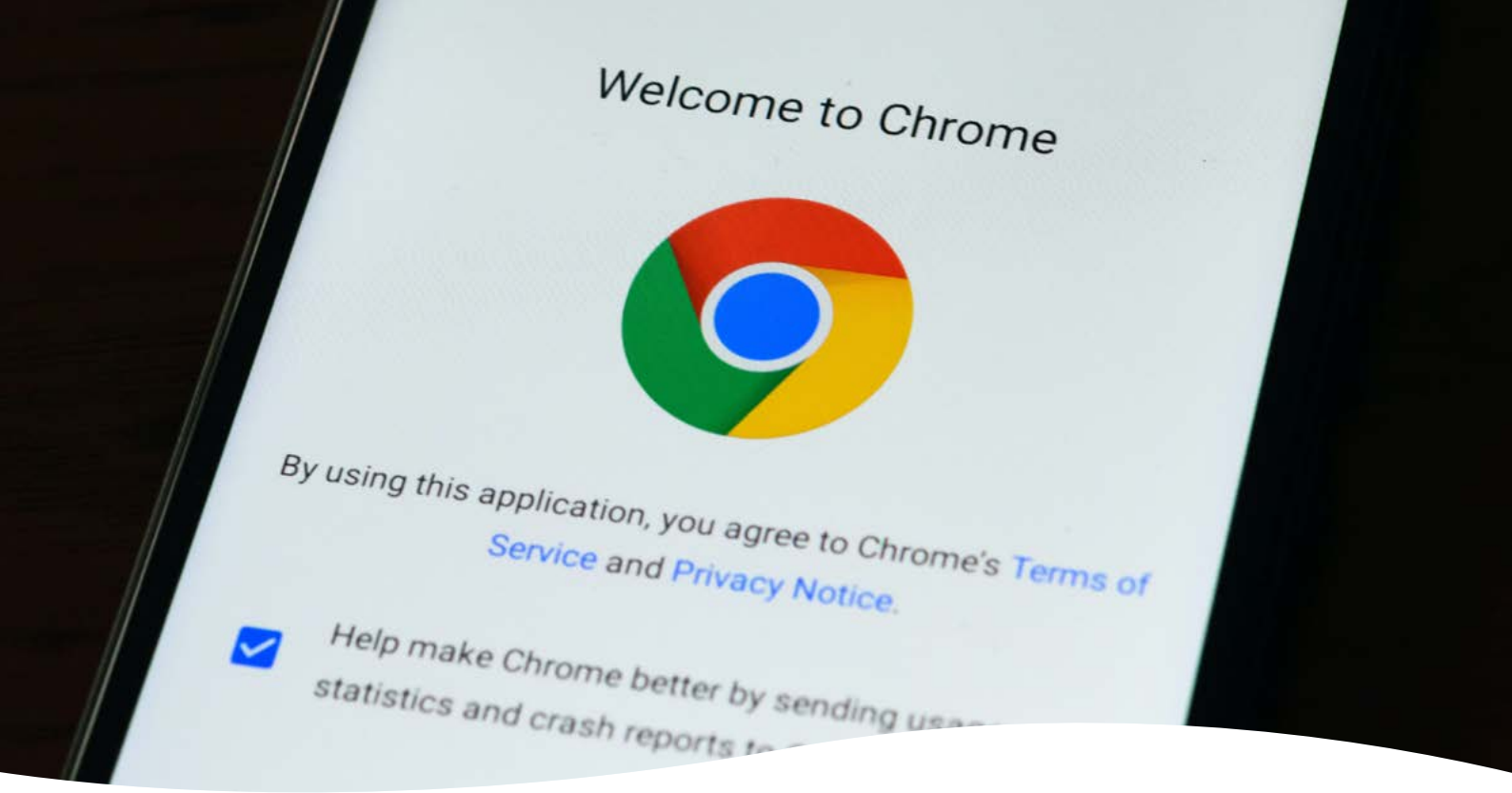
Pressure from Google to move to GA4

Google's response to the issue above appears to have conceded that Google Universal and GA 360 will remain illegal. And Google has announced that it will sunset these products in July 2023 with existing users being pressured into migrating to **its new GA4 solution**. Leaving aside the inconvenience of the switchover itself, the move has a number of issues not least the fact that there is no data portability between the respective products. And GA4 is still open to the issues we highlighted earlier around cookie/pixel-based tracking.



Broader based trust issues

Google has also come in from heavy censure from regulators in the EU including the **recent Irish Data Protection Commission (IDPC) investigation** into Google's online advertising approach. Which resulted in a hefty fine of €390m.



The likely impact of the removal of third-party cookies

And despite a number of false starts that have seen the deadline go back twice Google has confirmed plans to remove third-party cookies from its **Chrome browser by late 2024**.

Google is a little late to the party here - trailing in the wake of other browser providers like Apple and Mozilla who had already dropped the use of third-party cookies. And is responding to a number of pressures that range from increasing calls for user privacy and concerns around data use and security, to the impact of legislation and the regulators flexing their muscles as outlined above.

And Google's decision has significant implications for the market for a number of reasons including:

→ **The huge impact on behavioural advertising**

A really significant chunk of existing media plans have relied on cookies for targeted, behavioural based advertising which simply isn't going to be possible in its current form once they go away. And certain types of advertising, for example re-targeting and display (programmatic), will be particularly badly affected

→ **Chrome is a huge chunk of the browser market**

The sheer scale of penetration of the Chrome browser amongst internet users means the impact will be felt far and wide. According to **Statista**, Chrome has seen stellar growth in the last 10 years with an incredible market share of 67% in 2022

→ **Wider industry changes are being felt too**

The decision is being foisted on a market already feeling the effects of the iOS 14 change

It is worth noting here that Google will not stop tracking altogether – and they are in the throes of providing cookie replacement suggestions right now as part of their **Privacy Sandbox** which is worth keeping an eye on.

A 6-point checklist for choosing the right attribution solution

So, that is the backdrop that marketers have to operate in right now.

One that is riven by structural change and being impacted by a range of factors from poor data quality to issues of trust with the large platform providers. In many ways it sees marketers at a measurement and attribution crossroads.

So, we thought it might be useful to leave you with our 6-point checklist for choosing the right attribution solution right now.

POINTONE



Choose a solution that enables you to rebuild your broken analytics data

Much of the focus of the discussion around attribution is on selecting the right attribution model for your needs. And, while that is a key consideration, if the underlying data you are feeding into your model is poor - for example due to limitations in the type of cookie/pixel tracking that is inherent in solutions like GA and Adobe – then it stands to reason that the quality of your attribution will be poor.

Look for solutions that leverage the **power of AI and Machine Learning** to help you rebuild your broken data and provide the attribution view you need.

POINT TWO



Explore non-cookie based attribution solutions

The **impending death of third-party cookies** has triggered an industry wide discussion about cookies themselves. But the reality is that cookie-based measurement is far from the only game in town. So, make sure that you cast your net far and wide as you evaluate your options. And consider futureproofing your attribution strategy by switching to a non-cookie based solution.

POINT THREE



Choose a solution that lets you see right across the customer journey

To be effective, attribution needs to take into account the impact of touchpoints right **along the customer journey** and that includes the impact of higher funnel activity like Display and **Paid Social**. So, solutions that rely on oversimplistic attribution models like Last-Click are not going to be adequate for analysing complex, multi-touch buying journeys.

And analytics reporting from the big platform providers like Facebook is only going to provide an assessment based on the limited data sets they have post iOS 14. So, make sure you choose a solution that provides a view right across the customer journey.

POINT FOUR

Check out what Google has to offer

It would pay dividends to keep one eye on the developments at the Google Privacy Sandbox. Google currently has a number of proposals out for consultation with the industry including **Google Topics** and the FLEDGE API which are aiming to provide replacement cookie solutions for targeted advertising, in a more privacy-safe way.

Early indications are that the industry have given them a cool reception with concerns being raised around the lack of targeting granularity and likely take-up of the solutions. However, things are fluid and you should check in periodically on this.

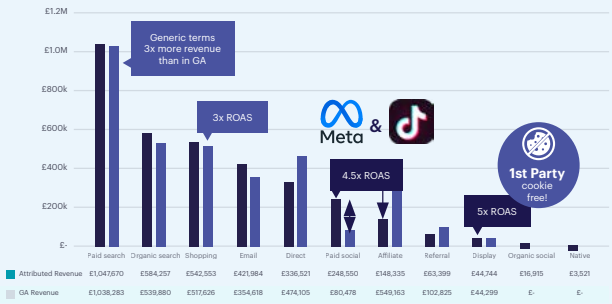
POINT FIVE

Make sure you are able to connect spend with revenue

The ability to draw a direct line from marketing investment through to revenue is non-negotiable now.

So, the onus is on you to seek out a solution that enables you to establish marketing ROI at:

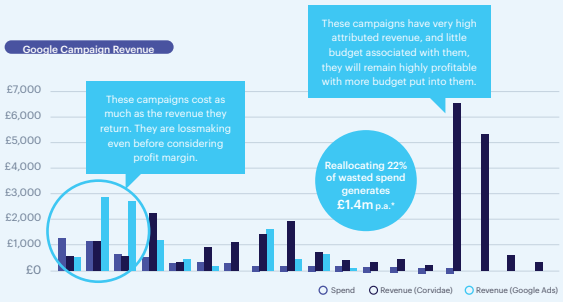
- → channel level
- → campaign level
- → individual creative level



POINT SIX

Don't plump for 'shelfware' style attribution reporting

The challenge with much attribution reporting it is good at telling you where you have been, providing a historical focus. However, the reality is that it is what you do with the analysis to change the game on channel and media selection that really turns the dial on revenue and ROI.



So, look for an attribution solution that provides highly actionable, 'what if' style analysis. For example, one that helps you identify campaigns that are costing as much to run as they are generating in revenue but crucially tells you where to place the wasted spend

Introducing Corvidae

Looking for an alternative attribution solution that will futureproof your approach?

Then look no further than **Corvidae**, our AI powered attribution platform that Remove ineffective marketing spend and convert new customers for the lowest possible price – and:

- → break down siloed data right across your marketing channels
- → Gain an understanding of the complete customer journey
- → Refocus marketing spend in the most profitable areas
- → Achieve greater ROI from your marketing efforts

Interested to learn more? Visit our website to **book a demo**, and let us show you how Corvidae can transform your wasted media spend.

Get in touch

