

A Guide to Monitored Free Distribution (Consumer Magazines)



Setting the standard

What is Monitored Free Distribution (MFD)?

MFD refers to free copies distributed in bulk on a regular, every issue basis to designated distribution points for intended free pick-up by the final individual recipients, or to be handed to by a merchandiser.

Examples of the different types of publication claiming MFD include:

- Publications collected free from supermarkets, garages, pubs, clubs, hotels and airport lounges.
- Publications handed to consumers in public areas

The three types of MFD

The MFD category has three classifications:

Gross Distribution: the quantity made available for free pick-up from distribution points.

Net Distribution – other: where a bulk supply is made available from distribution points, and ‘returns’, damaged or undistributed copies are accounted for.

Net Distribution – by hand: copies handed singly to individual final recipients by merchandisers at distribution points.

Pre Approval

The distribution systems and documentation used for MFD must be approved by ABC before any copies can be claimed.

- For newly joining titles this will be prior to membership approval.
- For existing member titles already claiming other types of circulation MFD systems approval must be prior to claiming copies in the MFD category.
- Any subsequent significant changes in distribution quantities, distribution points, or methods of distribution must be notified to ABC and approved prior to use.

Basic requirements

The basic requirement for MFD is proof of receipt of the bulk copies at each final distribution point. Proof of delivery alone is not sufficient. Proof of receipt means that the responsible person at each distribution point must sign and date a receipt document detailing the title of the publication and the quantity of copies received (and, if appropriate, the number of undistributed/uncollected copies of the previous issue – see below). Your Account Manager will have examples of proof of receipt documents.

The only exception to the requirement for a signature of receipt is in the case of *prior agreed* unmanned distribution points – i.e. a street corner dispenser. A point which is normally manned but where no-one happens to be present at the time of delivery would not be regarded as an unmanned point. For ABC agreed unmanned distribution points only, the signature may be of a third party deliverer. This will only apply if the third party deliverer is the person actually responsible for making the copies available for pick-up – e.g. placing the copies in a dedicated display box, dispenser or rack, and not simply leaving the copies on counters or bars, or outside premises. If the copies are just being delivered to premises, and not actually placed on display by the third party deliverer, the signature of the responsible person at each point is required, to confirm quantity delivered and returned copies

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The Master List of distribution points

For full details of what must be included on a Master List please see the Reporting Standards or for an example Master List please contact your Account Manager.

Reality Testing / Site Verification

The audit process for MFD includes 'call-backs' to the registered responsible person at a sample of distribution points to confirm signatures, that supplies are received on a regular basis, and that the copies are made available for free pick-up.

If a distribution point is classified as unmanned and there is therefore no-one at the point to contact then those points are subject to reality testing and site verification. This means that the locations will be added to our testing schedules so that those sites can be visited during the distribution period to confirm that copies are available for free pick-up at those points. All hand distribution is also subject to reality testing. In each case any reality testing fees are determined by the quantity and locations of any unmanned points and the additional fees necessary will be quoted on MFD system approval.

It may be possible for an unmanned point to have call-back details. For example, a dispenser in a shop or a rack in a hotel may perhaps be serviced by a 3rd party deliverer who confirms he has made the copies available for free pick-up, and if the shop owner/manager details are registered they could be contacted at audit for confirmation. In this case reality testing and the additional charges for same would not be necessary as the point could be checked via call-back in the normal way.

The Method of Distribution statement and Distribution Analysis

A Method of Distribution statement is included on the certificate. This is a factual statement of what happens to the copies. In addition to the statement, you will also need to report the average number of distribution points throughout the period, the normal date of distribution, the number of points of each type and the average number of copies to each type of point.

The purpose of these is to show the advertiser where, when and how the copies are distributed. All the information given must be verifiable from audit evidence.

Variations in the MFD supply

As the basic requirement of MFD is that it is regular in both supply quantity and in type(s) of distribution point you must notify ABC of any significant changes. Increases or decreases in the supply quantity of up to 10% (compared to the average of the previous four issues) are allowed without reference to ABC. If you wish to increase or decrease the total MFD supply by more than 10%, or you wish to change or revise the type(s) of distribution point you would need to apply to ABC for approval before implementing the changes.

How To Get More Information

The Consumer Magazine Reporting Standards are available from the ABC website www.abc.org.uk. If you need to discuss any aspect of ABC please contact an ABC Account Manager (01442 870800)

This outline is intended as a brief user-friendly guide to the topic. It is not intended as a replacement for, or interpretation of, the relevant ABC Reporting Standards. In all cases where this guide and the Reporting Standards differ, the Reporting Standards will prevail.