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Competing broadcast and cable TV executives are meeting this week to discuss developing a shared model to show how well advertisers' commercials worked, according to people familiar with the talks. Dubbed "Thor," the budding initiative is the latest attempt by the TV industry to answer the rise of digital media, which has benefited from a seeming ability to prove its ads led to the purchase of a product or the test-drive of a car, for example. "We want to show TV works and we can prove it," says one TV executive involved in conversations, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the fledgling

plan.

The group of TV ad sales executives will hear from Data & Math, an analytics company that aims to "link advertising exposure to real world customers," according to its website. It will pitch its "multi-touch" attribution model as a new common yardstick for networks to prove their ads' effectiveness. Such a platform would allow TV networks to show clients not only that their ads reached a certain audience but that they produced specific effects.

While TV networks already conduct internal research for advertisers on the effectiveness of their campaigns, Thor would standardize it so marketers could see how their campaigns delivered on their business goals across multiple networks. While the ability to target audiences beyond traditional age and sex demographics has been a focal point for many TV networks over the past few years, there's a growing desire among marketers to prove the returns on their investment.

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Washington (PA)

Observer-Reporter
[Third state lawmaker to run for Murphy's congressional seat](#)

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[Trump in Harrisburg: What we know about time, location, tickets and format](#)

There's also more of a willingness among TV networks to band together against digital competition. This spring, Turner, Fox and Viacom teamed up to help standardize audience targeting on TV. That means an advertiser going after a very specific audience segment can apply that same segmentation across the three network groups. Their initiative, called OpenAP, ended testing and became widely available to advertisers earlier this month. Thor is not being positioned as a competitor to OpenAP. The idea is that networks could be a part of both if they choose. The magazine industry in 2015 [banded together](#) to offer big advertisers not just metrics on sales results but to guarantee them. — **Ad Age**

Google found that Russian-linked entities bought tens of thousands of dollars worth of politically motivated ads on its platform around the U.S. presidential election, according to people familiar with the investigation, the first sign that Russia's alleged attempts to influence the 2016 vote spread to the world's largest advertising business. Similar to ads that ran on Facebook Inc., the ads on Google touched on a variety of hot-button social topics, without a clear bent toward one candidate or political position, these people said. The ads mainly ran above Google search results and on third-party websites where Google serves ads, another person said.

Google, a unit of Alphabet Inc., has shared some of the Russian-bought advertisements with congressional investigators, the people said. "We have a set of strict ads policies including limits on political ad targeting and prohibitions on targeting based on race and religion," Google said in a statement. "We are taking a deeper look to investigate attempts to abuse our systems, working with researchers and other companies, and will provide assistance to ongoing inquiries."

Google found that accounts linked to the Russian government bought \$4,700 worth of ads, while accounts with other Russian links spent \$53,000 on ads, one of the people said. Google used signs such as Russian IP addresses, Russian language settings or payments in Russian rubles to link customers to Russia, the person said. It isn't clear how Google tied some accounts to the Russian government. Russia has denied [U.S. intelligence agencies' reports](#) that it interfered in the election.

Google discovered the ad buys as part of a [broad internal investigation into Russian use](#) of its services ahead of the election, one of several probes into Russian meddling in the election by federal investigators, Congress and technology firms. Google's investigation extends beyond ad purchases and examines whether Russian actors used other Google tools, such as posting videos on YouTube. Facebook and Twitter Inc. have [both found Russian attempts](#) to use their websites to [influence U.S. voters](#), including by buying ads. Congressional investigators have asked Google, Facebook and Twitter to testify publicly on Nov. 1. [The Washington Post](#) and the [New York Times](#) previously reported Google's discovery of the Russian-bought ads.

Google identified the pool of ads by looking at any ads with political tie-ins that were also bought by customers with any Russian links, one person said. Google identified some of the ad buys by comparing its customers with Russian-linked accounts on Twitter, via data it downloaded from Twitter, this person said. Google is scrutinizing the ads to see which were bought by Russian trolls, or agents who specifically try to spread misinformation, and whether any were legitimate purchases, such as an American who happened to be in Russia while buying ads, this person said. Foreigners are broadly prohibited from spending money to influence U.S. elections, but many of the rules designed to police political spending were written long before digital media companies became a dominant force in political life.

Sens. Mark Warner (D., Va.) and Amy Klobuchar (D., Minn.) are working on legislation that would force digital media companies such as Google, Twitter and Facebook to make public additional information about who is buying political ads on their platforms, and to make such ads available to the public. "We must update our laws to ensure that when political ads are sold online Americans know who paid for them," said Ms. Klobuchar in a statement. "Foreign agents are taking advantage of loopholes in our laws." Still, that legislation likely wouldn't capture all of the ads bought by Russian agents. Some of the Facebook groups allegedly run by Russian entities [focused on social issues](#)—rather than specific candidates—with posts criticizing everything from immigration to police brutality to gun control.

Google built the world's largest advertising business by serving ads on its hugely popular services, such as YouTube and its search engine, which attract well over a billion users a month globally. One of the major innovations of Google's ad platform is its automation. Google enables brands to advertise on millions of search terms by simply filling out online forms and entering payment information. No human employees at Google typically sign off on the transaction. That automation has allowed Google's ad business to reach a huge scale, but the lack of oversight has made it susceptible to misuse. The company forfeited \$500 million in 2011 for letting Canadian pharmacies advertise prescription drugs to U.S. consumers, for example.

It isn't clear how many people saw the ads sold by Google. Russian use of tech firms' platforms went beyond buying ads. Facebook and Twitter identified hundreds of accounts with ties to Russia, and researchers have said posts by those accounts likely outnumbered ads bought by Russian actors. Facebook estimates 10 million users saw 3,000 Russian-linked ads on its site. But posts by Russian-controlled Facebook accounts were seen maybe hundreds of millions of times, [according to an analysis](#) by Jonathan Albright, research director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University. YouTube, the world's largest video site, is Google's main social-media network, and it is full of fringe content, including political videos posted by Russian users. For instance, Russian state media RT has amassed more than 5.4 billion views across 20 separate YouTube channels it controls. – *Wall Street Journal*

The proposal — letting a nonpartisan citizens commission, rather than politicians, draw lines for electoral districts — isn't novel. It was presented by Carol Kuniholm, the executive director of Fair Districts PA, last week in Center City at a forum that focused on gerrymandering — a practice in which a party in power contorts legislative and congressional boundaries to its electoral advantage.

Complaints about gerrymandering, a name derived from a 19th century Massachusetts governor and U.S. vice president who was a notorious practitioner, date to nearly the founding of the republic, notes David Thornburgh, head of the nonpartisan political watchdog group the Committee of Seventy. What is different these days is that the practices and the efforts to change them have reached perhaps unprecedented levels, said Thornburgh, who participated in that forum at the Pyramid Club, 52 floors above the streets of Center City, which included business and civic leaders.

And this has been a particularly brisk period. Lawsuits have been filed all over the country, and the Pyramid Club session was held on the evening after the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on gerrymandering, and the night before the commonwealth considered a petition on redistricting. "People are really fed up with how the parties have manipulated this process in a way that doesn't seem to be serving the people," Thornburgh said in an interview on Monday.

And Pennsylvania, a political battleground state, has become a battleground in the debate over gerrymandering. "The more I learn, the more I'm convinced this really is a significant foundational problem for us in a way that it's not for a lot of other states," Kuniholm said at the forum. Studies have documented that Pennsylvania is a national leader in gerrymandered districts. One classic example is the [Seventh Congressional District outside Philadelphia](#), which bobs and weaves in and around townships and boroughs across multiple counties since it was redrawn following the 2010 census.

The district "just exploded into this grotesque shape," Thornburgh said. "It has become literally more offensive." "I describe what the operatives are working with as political laser surgery," Thornburgh said in the interview. He said that sophisticated software and mapping capabilities have made redistricting more insidious. And given the contentious political climate nationally, the issue has taken on greater meaning.

Action in the courts has accelerated.

On Wednesday, Commonwealth Court in Harrisburg held a hearing on a lawsuit, filed by the League of Women Voters, contending the 2011 U.S. congressional map for the state was gerrymandered. The League is awaiting the court's decision, which is [unlikely to come down anytime soon](#). And organizations nationwide are waiting for their own suits to pan out, too, said league President Susan Carty. "We have to be hopeful, and we certainly look to our court systems to do what we believe is the right thing for the voters of Pennsylvania," Carty said. Regardless of outcome, "there's no doubt that we'll have to go forward and higher."

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University published a study in spring 2017, Kuniholm noted, that found that [out of five measures used to study gerrymandering, Pennsylvania was the worst in two: Efficiency Gap, which is being discussed in the *Gill v. Whitford* case now before the Supreme Court, and Seats-to-Vote, which "compares the number of votes vs. the seats won."](#) In her presentation, Kuniholm called for an independent commission whose members would not include legislators, their spouses or their staffers. They would be members of both major parties as well as nonaligned voters. Their job would be to set the lines of electoral maps, rather than whichever party holds power at the time of redistricting. And the commission would not be allowed access to sophisticated mapping technology and data mining tools.

Thornburgh said at the forum that Pennsylvania's partisanship was having repercussions beyond politics. "Hyper-partisan dysfunction is an enormous impediment to our international competitiveness," Thornburgh said. "Unless and until we can get a problem-solving, solution-oriented kind of response ... we're going to be playing the game with our hands tied behind our back."

Thornburgh said he was keeping a close eye on the court cases now in play and the efforts to establish a bipartisan redistricting committee. But, he said, Pennsylvania is among the hardest states to pass a constitutional change legislatively. "At this point, the smart bet would probably still be that this is a tough path to pursue," Thornburgh said. "But I think the reformers are absolutely in the game." – *Philadelphia Inquirer*

