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GOOGLE SELLING INVALID TRAFFIC

The press recently reported an article titled, "Google Charges Video Views Even When Identified As A Robot, Study Finds."

Let's take a step back and assess the situation.

The background we are all familiar with is that advertisers pay companies (like Google) to get their ads displayed on sites (such as YouTube in this case).

The premise we all assume is that those advertisers have negotiated with Google in good faith, expecting real people to see their ads running on YouTube.

After exposure to the ad, there is expectation that these real people will then take some sort of action, hopefully culminating in sales. This is then factored into how the advertiser calculates the return on its investment in the advertising campaign with Google.

However, sometimes real people are not seeing the ads.

There are many situations when ads are served to invalid traffic and the advertiser has lost a chance to convert ad exposure into sales.

The article rightfully observes that the advertiser bears the burden of the risk.

But the article does not point out perhaps even more important aspects: in this case, Google is beholden to the industry and must bear the burden of putting into place processes that attempt to filter and remove invalid traffic. Also, the burden of proof falls primarily onto Google to demonstrate that the ad running on its YouTube channels was exposed to valid traffic.

There are strict guidelines in place governing how companies in our industry are required to handle invalid traffic (i.e. bots). Advertisers are not the ones primarily responsible for distinguishing between invalid and valid traffic. In this case, Google is the entity primarily responsible.

Furthermore, if Google is selling invalid traffic and passing it off as valid traffic, then Google is breaking industry guidelines. A number of its services are audited by Ernst & Young with oversight by an objective third-party (MRC). If the audit reveals Google is selling invalid traffic in this manner, Google will not pass its audit, and the company will be stripped of its accreditation. If Google fails to address the audit findings, advertisers may begin to lose faith in Google, and could potentially put it out of business.

Will Google go out of business? Will it escalate to this point?

Although it is not likely, I emphasize this aspect because the guidelines are not just nice to know concepts. The guidelines are mandatory requirements.

For those of us who work in digital, the guidelines are reassuring. It reminds us we work in a business where companies are accountable.

All companies in this business need to follow the guidelines, especially those who are responsible for counting (i.e. video views). In this case, Google is on the hook, not the advertiser.

If there are advertisers who believe Google is including invalid traffic in its counts and passing it off as valid traffic, I encourage these advertisers to immediately contact the MRC where this issue will be effectively addressed. I also encourage advertisers not to be complacent on the issues and to make sure they have an understanding of the guidelines as well. Advertisers are not primarily responsible for detecting invalid traffic, but they are a responsible party nonetheless.

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About Craig Jaffe Research 360°:
Craig Jaffe Research 360° is a research and analytics consultancy that advises how consumer trends, behavioral shifts and attitudinal dynamics can be leveraged and monetized. The consultancy is hired to perform Analytics, Ad Sales Research, Program Research, and Consumer Insights. It utilizes a variety of resources -- such as Nielsen, MRI, comScore, Rentrak, and others -- and employs data science, research, and analytic techniques while working with media and marketing companies operating in the television, digital, and social marketplaces. Craig Jaffe Research 360° helps television networks and websites increase ad sales and audiences, and helps advertising and media agencies activate consumer purchase behavior.