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Google, Facebook and Amazon: The New Digital Era Begins Now

by Craig Jaffe, Wednesday, July 1, 2015 9:15 AM

There is a good chance many of your digital ad campaigns never successfully reached your impression goals.

What?

For example, you may believe that your recent digital ad campaign was seen by 10 million target impressions, but chances are it wasn't. The truth may be that 5 million of those impressions were seen by your target, and 5 million were fake and never seen by anyone. This leaves you with a massive short-fall and is terrible for business.

Why did you believe you reached 10 million target impressions? Invalid non-human digital traffic permeated your campaign making you think you reached your goal when you didn't.

If you're like many others, you may not have even been aware of this problem.

Transacting programmatically doesn't make you immune to this problem either. In fact, in some cases it appears to have made matters worse.

Mark your calendars. A new era in digital begins.

Our industry will undergo a significant and much needed change. The Media Rating Council (MRC) is sending out its guidelines for strengthening the detection of invalid non-human digital traffic.

We all know digital is a successful business and has been dubbed by some as the most accountable medium for advertising purposes. However, digital has enormous flaws, which has led others to suggest that it is one of the least accountable media, due to issues which prevent an accurate account of usership.

But it has great potential and is being cleaned up now.

Leading up to this week, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) worked with security firm White Ops to conduct the largest public study of bots -- a major form of invalid traffic affecting advertising. Everyone in our industry is encouraged to read the study.

Major findings address:

- Your ad campaign: digital ad fraud artificially drives up your campaign's audiences by 5% to 50%.
- Your money: if you advertise on digital, your company and others are collectively expected to be cheated out of more than \$6 billion this year in 2015.
- The sites you buy: fraud impacts a wide variety of areas on the internet, including major sites such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, and others.
- Your units: all types of advertising are affected, such as digital video and display.
- The way you buy: programmatic can be problematic, even when inventory is obtained from trusted sources.

Regarding this last point, the study identified three well-known programmatic ad exchanges that supplied programmatic traffic with over 90% bots during the study period

Was this you?

What are bots? The ANA and White Ops give a helpful description: non-human traffic. Automated entities capable of consuming any digital content, including text, video, images, audio, and other data. These agents may intentionally or unintentionally view ads, watch videos, listen to radio spots, fake viewability, and click on ads.

Bots can render or click on ads, requiring advertisers to pay for ad impressions or clickthroughs that were never served to a real human.

In order for our industry to proceed, it will be critical for everyone to review the new guidelines when they are released this week. With it comes meaningful change and improvement.

5 comments on "Google, Facebook and Amazon: The New Digital Era Begins Now".

Douglas Ferguson from **College of Charleston** commented on: July 1, 2015 at 9:31 a.m.

If advertisers have proof that half of their impressions are worthless, they should negotiate to only pay for the half that are real. TV commercials are discounted because of DVR-skipping, so why can't digital ads use the same discount. You must negotiate with the seller, but you have to measure the problem first.

Craig Jaffe from **Craig Jaffe Research 360°** commented on: July 1, 2015 at 10:14 a.m.

Thanks for sharing your thoughts, Douglas. The new guidelines will help the industry better filter and remove invalid traffic. How this may be used to help negotiate or renegotiate remains to be seen. Organizations responsible for measurement will be expected to provide disclosures to media buyers so buyers understand what was removed.

Jaffer Ali from **PulseTV** commented on: July 1, 2015 at 2:57 p.m.

Fraud is part of the fabric and DNA of those selling media. The media owners/sellers cannot clean the problem up because much of fraud is not accidental, but promoted by the very folks that will be asked to clean it up.

Craig Jaffe from **Craig Jaffe Research 360°** commented on: July 1, 2015 at 4:05 p.m.

To assuage industry concerns about this potential problem, keep in mind these guidelines are not just helpful tips. Compliance is required. Those who are asked to clean the data are subject to strict independent audits that need to be passed. Otherwise, there is a very real risk of forfeiting accreditation and certification, or never achieving it.

Troy Johnson from **AALBC.com, LLC** commented on: July 1, 2015 at 6:22 p.m.

A significant portion of internet traffic is originated by "bots." I have a bot that searches the internet for articles containing African American books, when it find one it will even post a tweet and or share it on Facebook, automatically. My bots have literally exchanged messages with other automated processes. All of this drives very little traffic to my website, but it does help me find articles I would never have discovered and I'm sure it inflates social media traffic.

Of course more nefarious Black hat types take these basic techniques to an entirely different level.

Every effort should be made to exclude this type of traffic from being counted in ad impressions, but it would appear no one other than advertisers have an incentive to do this; which makes this a problem for everyone, for advertisers foot the bill for much of what happens on the WWW... then again, maybe that is the problem.