

TrustList: Real time warning against programmatic advertising placement on 'red-listed' online media

Up to 15%* of the \$8bn global programmatic market is being siphoned away by profiteers in the made-for-advertising industry, diverting attention from readers and draining advertising budgets on platforms that often promote misinformation, disinformation, or clickbait.



Source: © 123rf [123rf](#) TrustList is a home-grown new digital initiative that aims to protect media buyers and brands by providing real-time warnings against placing programmatic advertising on 'red-listed' online media

This erodes trust, a vital component of successful advertising, which not only hinders meaningful connections with disillusioned consumers, but can create a knock-on effect for digital news media.

New home-grown digital initiative

TrustList is a home-grown new digital initiative that aims to protect media buyers and brands by providing real-time warnings against placing programmatic advertising on 'red-listed' online media known for systematic disinformation infractions, or 'grey-listed' media susceptible to disinformation amplification due to weak internal editorial systems.

Developed by a team of digital media experts, led by Code for Africa (CfA), Africa's largest indigenous non-profit civic technology and DYDX, a digital innovation organisation and digital transformation practice.

It is funded through a Google News Initiative (GNI) grant, in alignment with GNI's mission to work with publishers and journalists to combat misinformation, share valuable resources, and cultivate a diverse and innovative news ecosystem.

The South African National Editors Forum (Sanef), is leading the charge to drive the adoption of TrustList in newsrooms, while the Internet Advertising Bureau-SA (IAB-SA) is being engaged to secure buy-in from over 150 major advertising brands and media buyers.



Disinformation is part and parcel of social media's business model, new research shows

Carlos Diaz Ruiz 24 Nov 2023



Exploitation of the advertising ecosystem

"AI-driven made-for-advertising websites pose a significant threat to the digital media environment, leaving advertisers grappling with a challenge that compromises their investments and trust.

These deceptive websites exploit the advertising ecosystem, generating low-quality traffic and perpetuating ad fraud, resulting in financial losses and reputational risks for advertisers," says Geoff Cohen of DYDX.

To combat the challenges of ad fraud, advertisers must be vigilant and exercise due diligence, explains Cohen, with industry-wide initiatives that prioritise transparency and accountability set to play a vital role.

"Advertisers should demand visibility into the ad supply chain and support technologies like TrustList that combat ad fraud.

"Scrutinising ad placement data, selecting trusted partners and employing robust fraud detection mechanisms are crucial.

"Sharing best practices and collaborating on solutions will fortify the digital advertising ecosystem," adds Cohen.

First line of defence against disinformation profiteers

TrustList employs machine learning and robust AI tools to meticulously review every single website and digital page where an ad appears.

This process generates a comprehensive audit that empowers advertisers to update their permission lists with confidence, explains Cohen.

"Our TrustList technology is the first line of defence against disinformation profiteers. By providing real-time insights and recommendations, TrustList ensures that advertisers can make responsible choices in their media placements.

"Our mission is to empower brands to make informed choices about where their advertising dollars go, ensuring they don't inadvertently support disinformation and skew true return on investment," he says.



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Natascha Torres 20 Jun 2023



A trustworthy digital advertising landscape

Analysis of selected large digital media campaigns in the last quarter indicates that up to 40% of open web programmatic advertising was distributed to destinations that were either not brand-safe, part of a network of Made for Advertising publishers or had warning signs of ad-fraud behaviours.

“The concern is that 40c in every rand invested in digital marketing through open programmatic advertising is not just wasted, but funding bad actors in the digital media space and taking valuable commercial oxygen from local digital media platforms,” Cohen continues.

As advertisers navigate the challenges posed by AI-driven made-for-advertising websites, Cohen says resilience and adaptability are paramount.

“Investing in verification measures, demanding transparency, and fostering collaboration will safeguard investments, restore trust, and steer the industry toward a future where authenticity and value prevail.

“Together with our partners, we’re committed to building a cleaner and more trustworthy digital advertising landscape. TrustList is a step toward ensuring the integrity of online media.”

*According to a [recent report](#) from the US Association of National Advertisers.

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