Ad blockers vs publishers - The war rages on

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It cannot be ignored that advertising is what made the World Wide Web what it is today right from the humble beginnings. However what has been in every publisher's nightmares is what if we are to wake up one day with our target audience having had a Eureka moment of realising the power of ad blockers in enhancing their browsing experience? The question that remains on everyone's mind is if these tools could spell doom for the industry as we know it. Experts are guessing this could be the case and this has been proven by the drop inventory since ad blockers started mushrooming. In the US alone it has been reported that an estimated 15% of internet users have ad blocking software installed. In the UK ad blocking was already at 22% among over-18 year olds. That is a scary statistic.

Unless someone does something (and pretty soon) to combat ad blockers, the online advertising industry will eventually reach its demise. Little chicken syndrome you think. This will not happen in the next year or two for that matter, but it will eventually happen unless industry leaders devise a workaround.

Reports are coming thick and fast from different media outlets about how publishers are cracking down on these naughty buggers. Other publishers have gone the route of having a pop-up message that notifies users to opt to switch off ad blockers in turn make sure that the publisher continues to provide their readers with the information they see while generating revenue from ads.

Digiday recently reported that Condé Nast site Epicurious has been serving a pop-up to users, requiring them to disable their ad-blocking software or register in order to continue using the site. The strategy of enticing users with good content seems to work.

But it is not all doom and gloom

Google reportedly wants to implement a policy around acceptable ads. The buzz question has been; what will constitute an acceptable ad? Whatever an acceptable ad is, the move is set to affect advertisers and in a big way. The scenario is simple; why change something when you don't know what is wrong with it? Advertisers who are satisfied with their ads are most likely to be infuriated by the impending move; it has to be about what works for advertisers at the end of the day.

Of paramount importance is for ad servers and/or publishers to establish what types of ads consumers find unacceptable. This is set to be a tricky task since the approach to ad blocking is a blanket one. However we'll just need to hold our breath since this is still only in the pipeline. There is no doubt that if this is implemented, the sale of inventory is most likely to drop and advertisers are going to look for the next wave, any guess what that be would? Native advertising maybe?

As big as Google is, one cannot pin their hopes on them single handedly fighting ad blockers. Ad blockers are an industry wide problem, therefore ad ops, content creators and advertisers should play their part in reaching an amicable solution to combat the problem.

Keep users engaged and entertained

The old school way of creating entertaining and engaging ads can help in curtailing the rise of ad blockers. With that being said, content creators will need to go back to the drawing board and have fun while they're at it - after all, creativity is fun. An ordinary Joe on the street wouldn't think of blocking ads if they are entertaining, it is a matter of listening to what the audience wants.

Curiosity killed a cat

Publishers can capitalise on user's curiosity - How this can work is by blocking users with ad blockers from their sites. This may be a hard-handed approach, but in the long run it can work. Users go to different sites for their daily dose of news, shopping, posting, ranting - you name it, but if there are deprived of having access to those "necessities" due to having installed ad blockers, they will be left with no choice but to let ad blockers go.

Lean and non-intrusive ads are the future

Ad blockers are capitalising on the dissatisfaction of users when it comes to intrusive and misleading ads as well as the time it takes to load web pages when there are ads served. Ad operations could work hand in hand with advertises and publishers to devise a new approach to online advertising whereby lighter ads are served. In fact this is what the IAB (Interactive Advertising Bureau) is trying to achieve with their L.E.A.N ads principles. L.E.A.N. or "light, encrypted, AdChoice-supported, non-invasive ads," is a scoring tool, and the IAB expects to have a scoring algorithm in place, the results of which are still to be seen with time. IAB Tech Lab is developing tighter guidelines on page load impact and file sizes in order to have a lighter set of ads.

http://digiday.com/publishers/epicurious-tests-an-ad-blocking-message/
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About the author

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Constantly listening to the heartbeat of the digital media industry, I worked for various media and advertising houses and have around four years experience in the marketing and digital media environments. Always on the lookout for new products offerings and insights from various platforms like Google, Facebook, Appnexus, Tubemogul, as well as others in the digital media space, helps me when recommending solutions for clients.

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