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# WHAT IS REALLY THE RIGHT RESPONSE TO AD BLOCKING?

Ad blocking cannot be ignored so what can be done to combat the worrying phenomenon? There are three actions brands can take, but not all are wise

Ad blockers have become a phenomenon on a massive scale, one that no one in the worlds of digital or advertising can afford to ignore. The fact that when Apple launched iOS 9, three ad blockers – Crystal, Peace and Purify – made it into the top five top paid listings on iTunes shows the appetite from consumers for this functionality

The numbers we see every day show the scope of this practice: based on the ad impressions served by ADventori 15% to 25% of web users have an ad blocker.

The debate is raging: what can be done about ad blockers?

## Three possible attitudes

First, the Maginot line syndrome: ad blockers have organised an enormous racket and are destroying the value of the web, to their profit. So simple fixes are applied: either anti-ad blockers and soon anti-anti-ad blockers, anti-anti-anti-ad blockers, and so on) or legal action (the thirst for justice does not quite seem to have been quenched, despite the recent victory of Adblock Plus in the German courts last April), or some unlikely mix of the two.

We will dare to say it: this attitude is irresponsible. It refuses to tackle the root of the problem. And, for the time being, it is worse than counter-productive: it makes the general public more aware of the existence of ad blockers.

The second attitude, more

reckless than it is courageous: blocking users who block ads. This was the option selected by The Washington Post. The argument is a fair one: if you, dear users, consume my content free of charge, you do so thanks to money from advertising. No ads, no content. This raises two questions: in this age of overabundant information, is an audience exodus even possible? More generally, other than a small handful of names, who can afford the luxury of denying visitors?

The third attitude, and our preferred choice: clearly asking the question of ‘why?’ and taking action accordingly. What does the existence of ad blockers tell us? It’s a matter of striking at the root of the problem (but are ad blockers really a problem?), not confusing cause with effect.

## From dirty traffic to ad rejection

Originally, ad blockers were not downloaded to avoid the ads on

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online media. People initially used them to prevent inconvenient – and often annoying – retargeting pop-ups from ‘dirty traffic’, namely, pornographic websites, domain name parking sites and streaming or download sites.

In doing so, protecting themselves from embarrassing situations, users discovered added benefits: the whole browsing experience was suddenly unburdened.

In fact, as extenuating circumstances for the web, we have to acknowledge that online ads serve to crystallise decades’ worth of consumer rejection of promotions and advertising, from TV to outdoor displays by way of below-the-line marketing. Remember the origin of the use of the word ‘spam’: a Monty Python skit parodying a very bothersome radio ad.

Before display advertising, intrusive ads were running rampant in emails and search engines, with radical solutions in each case for stemming that tide: internet service providers’ spam filters for the one, and delisting for the other. Ad blockers are sort of the new anti-spam solution, just a little more radical than the previous generation.

The ad blocking crisis has brought to light the rejection of ads by a large and growing number of web users. The dispute is not with the ad blockers.

Instead, it is urgent to target the

meat of the problem by making ‘good’, relevant ads that are useful and responsible, and that always have a chance of offering a positive experience to people, which is very far from describing most ads.

## Good advertising is possible

So long as it keeps its eyes closed to the causes of the problem, the profession will be doing itself a disservice. It will continue on its rush towards short-term solutions. The value of advertising will deteriorate by increasingly fostering the concentration of supply and winning formulas in the hands of a few.

So, what’s the solution? What makes for good advertising? The answer starts with the format and template. On the internet, ads have yet to find their place. Between search engines (and their pre-purchase logic with strong potential for ROI) and the major offline media, primarily television (with its ability to reach massive audiences), display advertising needs to prove its full worth.

And it just might be on the verge of finding its purpose.

Didn’t the sponsored links invented by Bill Gross in 2001, and then largely served and optimised by Google AdWords, set the stage? Hasn’t the Mountain View-based firm become the advertising powerhouse that we all know today, precisely because it made the drastic choice of non-intrusive ads?

Does this mean that classic advertising – banners – are dead? Is there no space for a display format that presents





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a product or a brand in order to develop its reputation and its image, to inspire desire?

We believe that, especially in the case of banners, the only way to fight effectively is to improve the users’ ad experience, with two crucial prerequisites:

- Personalisation over carpet-bombing; and
- Limiting repetition over excessive exposure.

Under those conditions, ads on websites become tolerable, adhere to the unspoken contract between the users and the media, and add value to the relationship

between consumers and brands.

Programmatic advertising obviously has a major role to play: it must reveal important-to-hear truths, such as viewability, and guarantee the right placements for the brand’s image (brand safety).

In the same movement, it creates the conditions needed for “good advertising” by reaching the right person at the right time.

Dynamic creative optimisation (DCO) helps brands to send out the right message, namely a personalised message (based on location, weather, stock levels, etc), on a large scale (billions of

impressions), all within the framework of scripting that will continue to work over time and on different screen types, in accordance with the consumer’s discovery and decision-making cycle.

Repetition – advertising’s main impulse – is not questioned here; on the contrary. We know that exposing users to ads just once does not work. They need to see them an average of four times to be effective. Programmatic and DCO breathe new life into this logic by respecting the transactional relationship between each individual and the brand. Advertising that takes the consumer’s status into account is now possible, and storytelling will become the dominant strategy.

### Pains for knowledge gains

We all want good ads whether we are a user, brand, publisher or their stakeholders (agencies, solutions, space brokers, and so on).

A highly favourable terrain will continue to stretch before us, fertile ground in which to plant the seeds of what we are all slipping toward: mobile solutions, and

especially the cookie-free world of apps. All of advertising is migrating there. Apple has announced the native inclusion of an ad blocker in its next OS update. We have no choice: there will be fewer available spaces, combined with the need to find formats that are both effective and acceptable.

The ad blocking phenomenon is by no means reassuring to the leaders of major brands. It slows the transition to digital ads. But the shift appears to be irreparable, if only because media consumption is migrating toward digital, namely driven by mobile devices. And brand and consumer expectations will only grow more exacting.

As a result, it is now more necessary than ever to offer relevant formats and experiences. It is time to pave the way for a successful market shift.

**ADventori**  
LESS ADS, MORE EFFICIENT ADS

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