

World News Media Congress spotlights ad blocking

The World News Media Congress, which takes place in Cartagena from 12 to 14 June 2016, will present a just-published WAN-IFRA research report on the contentious topic of ad blocking, which has caught the attention of news publishers the world over, serving as a wakeup call on improving overall online user experience.



The 76-page report, *'Ad Blocking: The implications and strategies for news publishers'*, is the industry's most comprehensive research to date on ad blocking, and is the culmination of WAN-IFRA's broad initiative on the topic that began last summer when the global association brought together some of the leading publishers, associations, tech companies and more to address this growing threat.

"There was a clear agreement then among everybody 'around the table' that this was an increasingly critical matter to address collectively," said Vincent Peyrègne, CEO of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers. "This eventual global task force helped us to guide the work we needed to carry out, with the report being one natural and very necessary outcome of this effort."

In December, WAN-IFRA announced a Global Ad Blocking Task Force, comprised of publishers in Europe, North America and Asia and supported by WAN-IFRA, which will operate as a knowledge centre for publishers to share best practices, and facilitate discussion among other international trade bodies, stakeholders. It will act as a unifying voice, with the task of supporting the industry on both global and local levels.

Task force discussion

On the final day of the World News Media Congress, Ben Shaw, WAN-IFRA's director of global advisory, who is the association's topic champion on ad blocking, will answer some of the hard questions that publishers have regarding this

complex issue.

“We didn’t set out to provide one clear solution to this growing problem, but to identify, examine and share best-practice among global publishers, to raise awareness, to offer some guiding principles, and to continue to engage with all parties involved and closely monitor the issue,” said Shaw of the task force. “The report offers excellent insights to the numerous issues surrounding ad blocking, and some common recommendations about how publishers should tackle the topic.”

With Adblock Plus announcing just this week that it now has 100 million active installations (double what it claimed in January 2016), ad blocking is clearly an ongoing and growing threat for news publishers.

Case studies

“The majority of ad blockers are engaged and they want to improve the site. They do not want to block the site but they are trying to make us understand why they are doing it,” says Elnaz Esmailzadeh, head of commercial for VG TV in Norway, one case study featured in the report.

Through nearly a dozen case studies, the report examines how some publishers are already taking action on ad blocking. This includes a variety of publisher approaches, from individual titles taking action, including London-based City A.M., to groups, such as Axel Springer, as well as national approaches, such as an initiative by Swedish publishers, as well as one in the Netherlands, both of which are working with their national chapters of the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).

Five key results from the report

1. Ad blocking use continues to grow, so publishers must take action
2. The most effective solution is likely to include a variety of actions, such as to improve the overall ad experience for your users who are not using ad blockers
3. Publishers should focus on mobile-ready advertising opportunities that diversify online
4. Many publishers have already started experimenting with a variety of approaches to ad blocking users.
5. For all the talk of data, readers are actual people. If publishers are going to stop more people from resorting to ad blocking, everything must flow from this – trust.

In line with this last point, the report also addresses the vital issue of users' rights and privacy, which could legally limit what publishers in some countries are allowed to do, even in determining whether a visitor to their website has ad blocking software installed. The report is available to WAN-IFRA members to download free and for non-members to purchase.

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