

COLUMNS

How ad blocking will affect mobile marketing

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Ad-blocking has been dominating headlines, most recently with the Interactive Advertising Bureau's D.E.A.L., The New York Times' ad blocking approach and at Mobile World Congress last month in Barcelona, Spain, where news broke about Israeli startup Shine partnering with Three Telecom to block mobile ads on its network.

These developments are the latest proof that the rise of ad-blockers can arguably bring the mobile advertising business to its knees if mobile advertisers do not listen to, and respect, consumers.

The Shine deal has especially rattled the industry.

Rise and shine

Experts are discussing the question of whether the United States will be spared from such carrier-direct ad-blocking arrangements.

Some observers are suggesting a potential conflict of interest for carriers in the U.S. For instance, Verizon owns media properties such as The Huffington Post and its parent AOL and has a vested interest in keeping ads on mobile devices.

But U.S. carriers have an image problem, and they might warm to ad blocking to help them improve it and be perceived as consumer-friendly, putting the interests of their customers above their own.

The consumer-first perception has worked well for Apple, which has long been considered to be more concerned about user privacy.

In addition to allowing for ad blockers, Apple's iOS 9 prompts users to enable privacy settings whenever possible.

Google's Android, by contrast, has taken a more laid-back approach.

Recently, Android has begun prompting users about its privacy settings. It is likely, however, that Google will still be known as the company that is less concerned about privacy.

If U.S. carriers go this route, it will be a big boon to ad blockers.

Block and tackle

Recent insight from eMarketer revealed the factors that drive users to ad blocking.

Roughly half of ad blocking users surveyed said that they found pre-roll ads to be the most intrusive, but only 23 percent found that to be the case for in-article native video content.

We have all experienced an episode of a lagged video that fails to display and interrupts activity, so it is not surprising that these types of frustrating ad experiences are turning users away.

Consumers are clearly finding native ad formats to be less intrusive. If we want to avoid mass adoption of ad blockers on mobile, we should continue striving to respect consumer preferences and employ less invasive ad formats on mobile devices.

The data used for mobile campaigns is essential to this goal. Such data enables hyper-targeting, relevant and personalized ad messaging and uses algorithms that take into consideration the timing, place, weather, user profile and past user behavior.

Programmatic technologies are mature enough to be applied and eliminate annoying ad experiences and deliver appropriate content for the end-user.

Capping is also imperative. Nothing is more irritating for the user than receiving the same repeated, unwelcome message during a single session.

Yet, despite the potential for positive ad experiences, users are flocking to ad blockers on mobile devices. This phenomenon is a reminder that users want to be in control of their content.

If ads continue to be intrusive, the remedy to stop them is as easy as downloading an ad blocker or, as in Three Telecom's case, flipping an "on" switch. Conversely, if ads are transformed into content and services, the user will perceive them as valuable.

TO REIGNITE trust, a new alliance with mutual benefits should be forged between consumers and brands.

Consumers will find value not only in the free content to which they are granted access by allowing ads, but also from the relevant promotions that those ads are providing.

Brands will find value in engaging with the right consumers, maximizing their ROIs and growing their businesses, not to mention retaining the ability to reach consumers on their most essential and dear devices.

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