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Enabling Smarter Media Buying with Ad Verification

A white paper for media planners and buyers

doubleclick
by Google

doubleclick
by Google

Contents

Overview

This white paper explains DoubleClick's views on online advertising verification and why we built ad verification into our ad serving platform, DoubleClick for Advertisers (DFA). This paper offers up some potential limitations of using a third party for verification and the benefits of verification within the ad server. Finally, it discusses the five services of ad verification as defined by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB), and gives DoubleClick's perspective on each service.

Why Ad Verification from DoubleClick?

DoubleClick aims to provide advertisers and agencies with a unified platform that supports the entire online digital advertising value chain. With a unified platform, clients can easily optimize, tailor, measure and compare all elements of their campaigns using a common language and interface.

Offering verification then is just a natural extension of that philosophy. Why go outside of the ad management system to verify your campaigns when it should be a seamless part of the workflow?

That's a question clients have regularly asked us over the years. Many believe that verification should be seamlessly integrated into same system that handles ad trafficking, serving and reporting.

"I believe that the best functionality of verification is when it is integrated within the ad server," says Julian Zilberbrand, SVP with Starcom MediaVest Group in New York. "It all starts with safety and validation of the I/O—and that lives within the capabilities of an ad server. The most efficient method is to tap into those native capabilities that the ad server offers."

"A log of referring URLs to validate that the ad is serving in a safe environment, the geo information to validate that I'm hitting the appropriate geography: all that already lives in the ad server," he notes.

Based on his feedback and others, we have worked hard to introduce a solution that is easily accessible, doesn't disrupt the current workflow or require extra tags to implement and also provides comprehensive, detailed and transparent data.

Verification in DoubleClick offers these benefits:
- It's free and available to all users without additional contracts to sign

- No additional setup or tagging is required

- Seamlessly integrated into the workflow, easily accessible from the DFA reporting interface

- No data discrepancies as impression data for verification and ad serving are one and the same

DoubleClick stands by being an open platform that will work with any certified third-party ad verification service that you choose. And even though Google owns media properties such as Google Display Network and DoubleClick Advertising Exchange, the DoubleClick platform handle all impressions the same way regardless of the media source.

Background

Third-party ad verification providers arose as a new category in the ecosystem over the last few years to help advertisers and agencies to:

- Protect their brands, by ensuring all ads are placed next to appropriate content
- Validate that online ads are served to the intended audiences, according to the terms of the media insertion order.

But as with any emerging market, the need for standards and guidelines became apparent and so the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) took the lead on publishing guidelines in early 2012 in collaboration with the Media Rating Council (MRC). In the document, they defined ad verification as "a process which attempts to verify that one or more attributes of a served online ad have been executed in a manner consistent with the terms specified by the advertiser or agency."[1]

For an advertiser, any report of an impression being served on an undesirable page would be alarming. Yet one third-party verification service recently claimed that up to 56% of online advertising is served in inappropriate placements.[2]

To confirm the true extent of inappropriate placements, the industry needs better transparency and more universally accepted metrics. The IAB guidelines are a step in the right direction and we have supported that effort by contributing feedback during the process.

A developing ecosystem requires industry-wide definitions, standards, and thresholds for acceptable performance in order to thrive. This white paper seeks to further the discussion around ad verification by examining these issues.

The Benefits of Verification within the Ad Server

Including ad verification as a feature within the ad server presents certain advantages and opportunities for advertisers. For one thing, it eliminates the inefficiency of having to go through yet another system, another vendor, to accomplish a task that should be a natural part of the ad serving workflow. Streamlining ad operations is something that we at DoubleClick are committed to and we see providing verification features as fundamental to that effort.

The ad server generates more complete and detailed information, and mitigates the risk of data leakage (impressions and interactions missed due to browser events on the user's side). Your team benefits from a single login and a consistent interface to manage all aspects of your online campaigns. And more detailed reports give you better insights to help optimize your campaigns.

Table 1: Benefits of Verification in DoubleClick vs Third-Party Services

	Verification within the DoubleClick Ad Server	Third-party Verification Services
Efficiency	Tags already in place. No extra trafficking effort.	Extra tag added to every creative. Added trafficking effort.
Workflow	Accessed through all-in-one interface with no impact on workflow.	Requires logging into new system with different interface and learning curve or getting reports by email. Slows down processing and reporting.
Measurement	Most complete impression coverage. Domain- and URL-level transparency generates complete, accurate data. Easier reconciliation with partners. Single-source geo data for best results.	Less chance of complete impression coverage. Inconsistent standards between systems can undermine impression count accuracy. Extra tags risk bad redirects. Tag errors lead to inconsistent numbers. Multiple sources for geo data introduce discrepancies.
Campaign performance	No drop-off from extra tags or latency. Integrated interface yields better insights that support superior campaign performance. Inventory is pre-verified against your blacklist across DoubleClick platform.	Extra tags can add page load latency and increase drop-off rates. Reactive ad blocking can disrupt user experience. Added costs can lower ROI.
Seamless integration	Seamless links to other tools for remarketing, bid optimization, and better attribution that streamline workflow and boost performance.	Limited integration with other tools.

A more holistic take on ad verification

The DoubleClick ad server is useful during the reconciliation process as it acts as a central repository for all your online campaign data. It captures all the trafficking instructions as outlined in the media plan and stores detailed data on all impressions served through DoubleClick.

By looking at ad verification in a more holistic way, DoubleClick delivers some key opportunities to advertisers and agencies over and above the fundamental brand safety features that most verifiers provide.

More granular data: You cannot get more granular data on ad impressions than from the ad serving system. We capture per impression data such as date, time, site and URL for each of the billions of ad impressions we run through the platform every day. When your verification data is tied to your ad serving data the campaign analytics possibilities start to open up.

For example, if you track media costs in DFA you will be able to calculate Cost per Viewable Impression and Cost per Viewable Activity using DFA Reporting tools. Additionally, Ad Visibility and Content Score can be used as data points in an attribution model to be even more effective in optimizing your campaigns.

Smoother reconciliation: If a publisher serves impressions outside your desired geography or otherwise doesn't meet the terms of your I/O, you can tell them not only the exact number of missed impressions, you can also tell them how much it cost provided you have media cost entered into the system.

Pre-verified inventory: We're currently looking into ways to leverage our unified platform to offer advertisers pre-verified inventory. In this scenario if you maintain a flagged list of domains for verification, that list can be shared across the buy side and sell side of the DoubleClick platform. That means that if you were to buy inventory through Invite Media, DoubleClick Ad Exchange, or serve your ads to publishers on DoubleClick for Publishers, nothing on your flagged list is presented to you. This pre-verified inventory helps align your campaign goals with your results.

Global classifiers: If you run campaigns in multiple languages, you can get pages from around the world classified in the same system. Content classification across all the major languages worldwide is crucial for large global advertisers. We currently offer 11 of the most common languages and are working to continue to grow the list to include more languages.

Publisher-friendly features in DoubleClick Verification

For publishers, we believe that ad verification should be a collaborative, not punitive, experience. After all, the goal is to improve both buy-side and sell-side performance. The DoubleClick ad server also provides these publisher-friendly features:

Anonymous inventory: If a publisher prefers to designate certain inventory as anonymous, DoubleClick makes this easy to do. The DoubleClick Verification system will not disclose the domain or show any screenshots of anonymous inventory.

Transparent verification: To give publishers more transparency into the verification process, DoubleClick will soon allow advertisers to enable publishers to log in and see how their inventory is being classified.

Limits of Third-Party Ad Verification

As shown in Table 1, third-party verification services have their limitations. These services work by adding an extra tag to every online ad. But these extra tags can add costs, through direct fees and added trafficking costs. They can also add friction to the workflow, increase latency, and introduce measurement errors.

For example, internal research by DoubleClick showed that third-party verification tags introduce measurable latency into ad rendering. And adding any extra tag slightly decreases the chances that the ad transaction will be completed successfully.[3]

Five Service Lines for Ad Verification

According to the IAB guidelines, ad verification includes the five services shown in Table 2. Any legitimate service provider must offer at least one service, implemented according to the guidelines. Every service relies on clear communications and precise specifications among advertiser, agency, ad server, and any verification service.

DoubleClick applies the same standards to all inventory, no matter the source, including all impressions delivered through Google's media properties such as Google Display Network, DoubleClick Advertising Exchange, and YouTube.

As noted, the only exception to this full coverage is when a publisher designates certain inventory as anonymous.

Table 2: Verification Services Lines Defined by IAB

IAB Service Line and Definition	DoubleClick's Perspective
1: Site Context To review the context within the page in which an ad appears, and assess the context against established parameters for the campaign.	DoubleClick supports this service line with the following features: • Fully-automated URL- or page-level reporting • Fully-automated coverage of every campaign • Highly granular content categories drawn from Google's proven contextual engine • Current content categories include adult, alcohol, derogatory, filesharing, forums, gambling, hacking and cracking, image or video sharing, politics, profanity, recreational drugs, religion, suggestive, tobacco, tragedy, transportation accidents, violence, and weapons • Current multi-lingual context classifiers support Chinese (Simplified), Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese and Spanish, and partially support Chinese (Traditional) and Korean
2: Geo To review that ads are served within the geographic area(s) specified by the terms of the campaign.	DoubleClick supports this service line using IP-lookup to yield precise geo-targeting data.
3: Ad Placement To review that ads are placed on page locations and in ad sizes/ executions within the parameters specified for the campaign, including ad position, size, orientation, other requirements such as frequency capping, share of voice or road blocking.	DoubleClick is planning to incorporate the Active View metric, already in DFA pilot testing, to gauge ad viewability. Active View gives users a per impression reporting on ad visibility statistics. The metric follows by default the proposed IAB standard of 50% viewable on-screen for at least one second but also allows advertisers to define their own formula for visibility if desired.
4: Competitive Separation To review that an ad is not inappropriately juxtaposed with a competitive advertisement, as defined in the media plan for the campaign.	DoubleClick is researching how best to implement this service. Note that no service provider can support competitive separation for auctioned impressions on dynamically assembled webpages. Separation is only possible on premium inventory bought directly from publishers. Ideally any competitor would be defined for each campaign by SIC code or precise company / division name.
5: Fraud Detection To review for fraudulent or potentially fraudulent activity involved in the serving of the advertisement.	DoubleClick is researching how to best implement this service. Our approach will: • Leverage Google's expertise, engineering resources, and worldwide infrastructure • Offer regular and full contextual crawl of every impression • Use field-proven screening for malware, spam, viruses • Provide sophisticated monitoring to detect latest, most advanced schemes • Offer tag format analysis to detect cache busting or malformed tags

Features Under Development from DoubleClick

Beyond those already discussed, we're working on several more services to extend the capabilities of the DoubleClick Verification. These extended services illustrate DoubleClick's view that the entire online display advertising value chain must be supported by a simple, effective, and integrated workflow.

Pre-emptive ad blocking

This service is defined as preventing an ad from appearing on a page based on specified criteria predetermined by the advertiser and its partners.

The typical reactive ad blocking of today is far from satisfactory. Reactive ad blocking can introduce more latency into a transaction, disrupt the user experience when a "dead zone" appears in place of the blocked ad on a page, undermine the publisher's branding, and create friction between advertisers and publishers that is difficult to resolve.

DoubleClick is currently researching the goal of proactively eliminating inappropriate impressions without disruption or friction, using technologies leveraged from Google.

"Ad blocking would be less burdensome, and carry less infrastructure risk, if this type of verification function was integrated into ad serving systems," agrees the IAB position paper. "This type of integration of verification services into advertising infrastructure is encouraged for the future."[4]

Custom content classification

We're actively working on ways to define custom classifiers that meet the needs of specific industries or businesses. By leveraging existing Google technology we can allow users to identify concepts (e.g., "financial crisis" or "animal cruelty") rather than maintaining a keyword list to always stay up to date. In the same vein, sentiment detection allows for determination of a positive or negative tone—for example, to only flag sites that have a negative opinion of your brand, product and so forth. Look for new features in this area soon.

Conclusions

This white paper shows that the most logical, most transparent, and efficient home for ad verification is within the ad server itself.

Providing the full range of ad trafficking, verification, and reporting features in a single interface will help you access better data, streamline your workflow, generate better reports, optimize your campaigns, and access other tools for added value.

Having verification features embedded within the ad server will make it easier for you to monitor and protect brand safety; improve accountability from publishers, ad networks, and other inventory sources; and build trust among all partners in the online ad transaction.

To find out more about how you can benefit from DoubleClick ad verification, contact your DoubleClick representative or visit www.google.com/doubleclick.

Notes

[1] "Guidelines for the Conduct of Ad Verification", Interactive Advertising Bureau and Media Rating Council, 14 February 2012, p5 available from http://www.iab.net/ad_verification

[2] "Trust Index Insights, Benchmarks and Findings on Online Advertising Compliance 2H 2011," DoubleVerify, 3 April 2012, p7

[3] Browser redirect drop off rates, Google internal research, 2011

[4] IAB, p14

About DoubleClick for Advertisers

DoubleClick for Advertisers (DFA) is an ad management and ad serving solution that can help you manage the entire scope of your digital advertising program: media planning, trafficking, targeting, serving, optimization and reporting. With DFA, advertisers and agencies can streamline normally time-consuming tasks associated with the trafficking workflow, enjoy consistent measurement across all digital campaigns and gain insight into campaign effectiveness thanks to robust reporting and analytics tools.

About DoubleClick

Google's DoubleClick™ products provide ad management and ad serving solutions to companies that buy, create or sell online advertising. The world's top marketers, publishers, ad networks and agencies use DoubleClick products as the foundation for their online advertising businesses. With deep expertise in ad serving, media planning, search management, rich media, video and mobile, our DoubleClick products help customers execute their digital media strategy more effectively.

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