

The State of Ad Block, 2015 **Part II**

Advertising in the Age of
Ad Block: What Works and
What Doesn't

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Introduction

The digital marketing industry is nearing the end of a cycle that began with the birth of the web. To draw consumers to their sites, publishers began providing free content—plenty of it. Then, to monetize that content, they started to accept advertising—too much of it.

In order to attract the click-happy consumer's wandering eye, ads became larger and louder. They became more disruptive and intrusive, cluttering pages, interrupting experiences, and gathering data, all contributing to an ad cacophony that now follows consumers from site to site. The results? A sharp decline in consumer goodwill. Banner blindness. Loss of trust. Ad blocking software.

In this new landscape, you have two choices:

1. **Stick to your current methods**
2. **Change how you advertise**

Maybe a blend of both is in order, but that's for you to decide.

In this ebook, based on a webinar by TapInfluence with Dr. Johnny Ryan, head of ecosystem at PageFair—take a peek behind the curtain to discover the methods successful brands are using to break through the ad block firewall. Learn what works (and what doesn't) as you plan for 2016 and beyond.

Section 1

Stick to Your Current Methods

(While Applying a Few New Tricks)

Maybe you're not quite ready to give up on banner and video ads entirely, but you're willing to employ a few fresh maneuvers to crack through the ad block firewall and generate more engagement.

You have five options at your disposal:

1. Get whitelisted
2. Ask nicely
3. Ask firmly
4. Declare war
5. Create less offensive ads

Let's look at each method to see what works and what doesn't.

1. Get Whitelisted

Ad block companies need more than the generous donations of users to survive. One reliable revenue stream is the whitelist: pay a whitelisting fee, and the ad blocking software won't block your ads. Whitelisted ads for Adblock Plus must meet exacting guidelines. For starters, acceptable ads:

Are not annoying

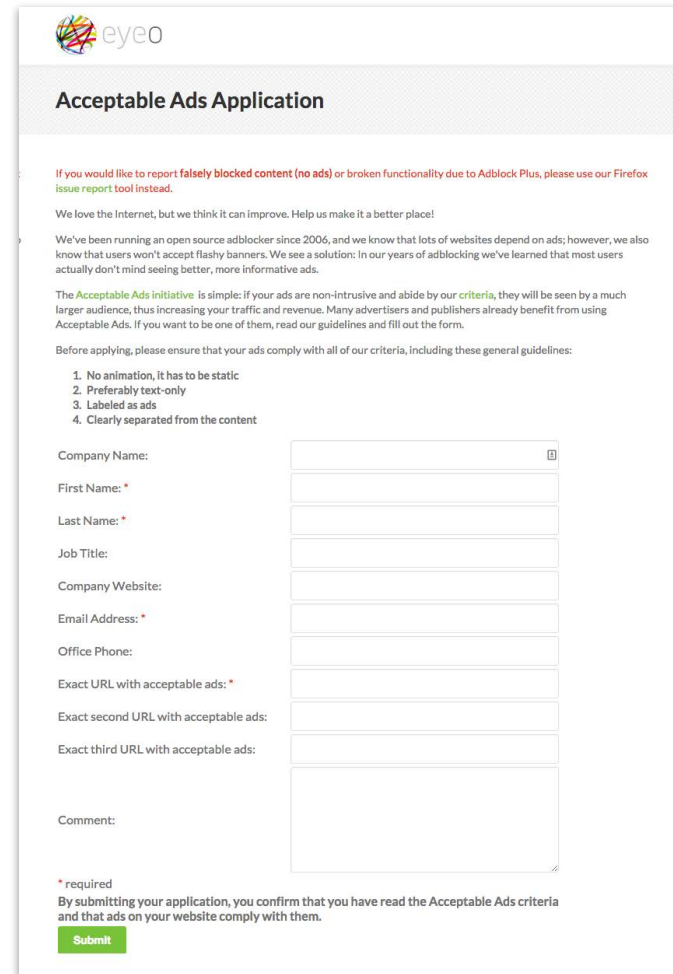
Do not disrupt or distort the page content

Are transparent about being an ad

Are effective without interrupting the experience

Are appropriate to the site

For now, small- and medium-sized websites and blogs can apply to join the Adblock Plus whitelist at no cost. Larger companies, like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft, already pay to place their ads on the whitelist.



The screenshot shows the 'Acceptable Ads Application' form on the eyeo website. The form includes a header with the eyeo logo and title. Below the header, there is a warning about reporting blocked content. The main body of the form contains introductory text about the project and a list of four guidelines for acceptable ads. The form fields include: Company Name, First Name, Last Name, Job Title, Company Website, Email Address, Office Phone, Exact URL with acceptable ads, Exact second URL with acceptable ads, Exact third URL with acceptable ads, and a Comment field. A 'Submit' button is located at the bottom of the form.

eyeo

Acceptable Ads Application

If you would like to report **falsely blocked content (no ads)** or broken functionality due to Adblock Plus, please use our [Firefox issue report tool](#) instead.

We love the Internet, but we think it can improve. Help us make it a better place!

We've been running an open source adblocker since 2006, and we know that lots of websites depend on ads; however, we also know that users won't accept flashy banners. We see a solution: In our years of adblocking we've learned that most users actually don't mind seeing better, more informative ads.

The **Acceptable Ads initiative** is simple: If your ads are non-intrusive and abide by our **criteria**, they will be seen by a much larger audience, thus increasing your traffic and revenue. Many advertisers and publishers already benefit from using Acceptable Ads. If you want to be one of them, read our [guidelines](#) and fill out the form.

Before applying, please ensure that your ads comply with all of our criteria, including these general guidelines:

1. No animation, it has to be static
2. Preferably text-only
3. Labeled as ads
4. Clearly separated from the content

Company Name:

First Name: *

Last Name: *

Job Title:

Company Website:

Email Address: *

Office Phone:

Exact URL with acceptable ads: *

Exact second URL with acceptable ads:

Exact third URL with acceptable ads:

Comment:

* required
By submitting your application, you confirm that you have read the [Acceptable Ads criteria](#) and that ads on your website comply with them.



“We want to **make the Internet better** for everyone. Purging bad ads is a good start.”

Does **Whitelisting** Work?

The AdBlock Plus whitelist has been in use since 2011. Yet Eyeo—the company that administers the software and whitelist—reported at the end of September 2015 that only about 700 publishers and websites are on the publicly-available list, and only 10 percent of them pay for the privilege.

Such a small number on the list confirms complaints that the whitelisting process is long and somewhat arbitrary: only AdBlock Plus decides whether an ad meets its

whitelist criteria. Although the company is creating an independent board to manage its Acceptable Ads program, marketers must “wait and see” whether such a board—when it launches in 2016—can change the status quo.

Despite whitelisting, many companies find themselves blocked again with a single click, because consumers who use AdBlock Plus can bypass the whitelist by simply unchecking the default setting, which allows whitelisted ads to show.

2. Ask Nicely

One way a publisher can circumvent ad blocking is by asking consumers to make an exception and support the site by viewing ads as they read site content.

Wired, The Guardian, The Atlantic, Forbes, Wikipedia, and other major (and minor) sites are dabbling with the approach.

Does **Asking Nicely** Work?

It doesn't, as Dr. Johnny Ryan, head of ecosystem at PageFair, explained in a recent TapInfluence webinar on ad blocking.

“What we found in our own experiments is that asking nicely produced a less than one percent conversion rate, which is incredibly low. When we spoke to publishers of other sites, we found the same thing: that they were all finding a less than one percent conversion rate.”

**THIS IS A HAIKU
TO ASK YOU: PLEASE TURN OFF YOUR
AD BLOCKER. LOVE, FORBES**

SO NORMALLY
THERE WOULD BE AN
AD IN THIS SPOT.
BUT YOU'RE USING
AN AD-BLOCKER
LIKE A BOSS;
LIKE A BOSS WHO
HATES ADS.
& THAT'S COOL, EXCEPT
THAT OKCUPID IS
AD-SUPPORTED,
& WE NEED MONEY
TO RUN THIS BEAST.
HERE'S A SOLUTION: YOU
DONATE \$5
TO US ONCE, & WE
REMOVE ALL ADS FROM
THE SITE FOREVER.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO
SEE GARBAGE ADS;
WE MAKE A LITTLE OF
THE MONEY BACK
THAT WE'RE LOSING
FROM THE BLOCKER.
EVERYONE WINS.

3. Ask Firmly

When the nice approach doesn't work, publishers often resort to stronger tactics, restricting or withholding content from users who have ad blockers turned on.

Does **Asking Firmly** Work?

Dr. Ryan says no—except for publishers of long-form content. “If you have long-form content, like a television show, it may be that your site is the only place I can go to see that. But if you're simply showing me a news story I can see somewhere else, then I'll just go somewhere else to see that content.”

4. Declare War

When asking nicely and asking firmly both fail, publishers often fall into the trap of playing cat and mouse with consumers using ad blockers.

“[Cat and mouse] is where a website owner hires a service to constantly change the location from which ads are being served, or to constantly cycle how the ads appear,” explained Dr. Ryan.

One commenter on the AdBlock Plus forums had this to say about such games: “The only way [publishers] can make even some headway is if they begin changing up their domains, IP addresses, URLs, creatives, and everything else on an hourly basis like the email spammers.... Are advertisers really going to double their IT departments and burn through domains on an hourly basis just to get the attention of people who won't click and buy? I think not.”

Does **declaring war** work?

According to Dr. Ryan, the answer is no. “The ‘trench warfare’ approach works for the short term, but does more harm than good in the end. The ad blocking community gets quite annoyed, and they retaliate by blocking all JavaScript on that web property, a move that, in turn, results in the crazy situation where the publisher must ask the ad blocking community for help to implement any new features on the website.”

5. Create Less Offensive Ads

If publishers can't prevent consumers from using ad blockers, they can choose to listen to them by refusing to accept placement of offensive and intrusive ads:

Interstitials, Popups, Popovers
Un-skippable videos, Banners, Flash ads, and Ads with sound.

Consumers will appreciate it, and publishers can reduce the flow of profanity-laced consumer comments (like this one) that echo across the Internet:

"So has anybody ever tried to address the root cause of ad blocker use, i.e. ads are really \$&@!* annoying? I don't like ads in general, nobody does, but that alone wouldn't be enough to make me bother to install and maintain Adblock. What does it is strobing "YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY WON" and animated "one weird trick" scams and softcore porn. This \$&^@ is *everywhere,* even on allegedly respectable news sites.

If you want me to turn off Adblock, you need to insist on reasonable, non-offensive, non-animated ads. If your ad provider doesn't do that, get a better one, or lean on yours until they do. If this industry spent one-tenth as much energy pushing ad services for better quality standards as they do wringing their hands about ad blocking, \$*!@ would happen."

- PageFair user @PhasmaFelis

Does creating **less offensive ads** work?

According to the results of an ad effectiveness study by Sticky, the answer is yes. Consumers reported seeing static ads 66 percent of the time, and flash ads 64 percent of the time. Although ad recall and brand identification was about the same for both flash and static ads, static ads triumphed in likeability, coming in 20 percent higher. Consumers also indicated almost double the click intent for static ads over flashy ads: seven percent for static, four percent for flash.



Check out these unobtrusive static ads by the British Council.

Source: 2014 Ad Effectiveness Study, Sticky



Section 2

Change How You Advertise

*Influencer
Annabelle Fleur
of VivaLuxury*

If you're ready to say "out with the old, in with the new"—or even if you're not—it's time to move towards Digital Advertising 2.0. It's time to divert budget away from the types of ads consumers hate and toward two forms of marketing they respond to and trust:

1. Content marketing
2. Influencer marketing

1. Divert Budget to Content Marketing

The word is out.

Content is the new advertisement, and a fast-growing channel to build relationships with consumers. According to a report by PulsePoint and Digiday, 83 percent of marketers believe content marketing will become more programmatic in 2016. By 2017, marketers will grow their content marketing budgets by 59 percent.

According to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is “the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable information to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly-defined and understood target audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action.”

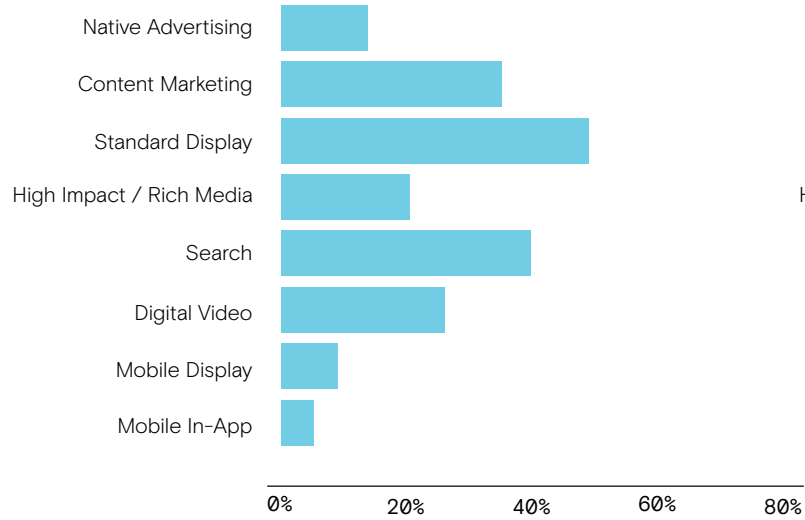
Source: [2014 State of the Industry Report](#), PulsePoint and Digiday

Does **content marketing** work?

You be the judge: The same PulsePoint / Digiday report says that 60 percent of agencies and brands view content marketing as very significant to their overall marketing strategy, while 61 percent of publishers say that content marketing is significant or very significant in their revenue model.

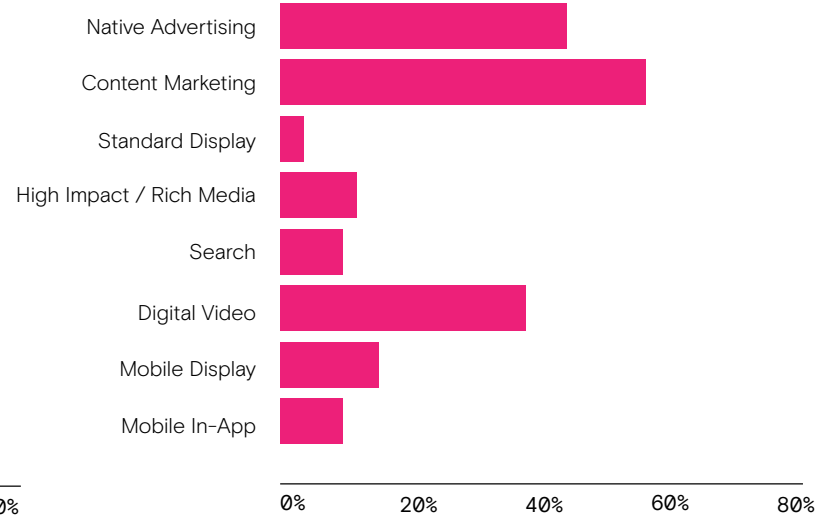
Brands / Agencies

Which of the following uses the largest proportion of your budget?



Brands / Agencies

Which of the following do you expect to shift more budget toward in the next 2 years?





Influencer Chelsea Foy of Lovely Indeed

2. Divert Budget to Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing, a form of native advertising, is a powerful tool for reaching consumers who are turned off by traditional advertising methods. Influencer marketing is an overt or subtle mention or recommendation from influencers: established, independent bloggers, vloggers, and social media mavens who design and create authentic, meaningful content on behalf of brands.

Source: [2015 Influencer Marketing Study, Tomoson](#)

Does **influencer marketing** work?

In a word: Phenomenally.

A recent Tomoson study showed a \$6.50 return on every dollar spent on influencer marketing. And that's just the average. The top 13 percent of brands are seeing returns of \$20 or more on each dollar, and returns improve dramatically when marketers use automation to scale their influencer marketing efforts.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear, and consumers are in control. They use ad blocking software because they are fed up with traditional advertising tactics.

All that remains is what you plan to do about it. Will you do what you've always done and hope for different results? Or are you ready to embrace proven new alternatives that deliver better engagement and a higher ROI? When you're ready to choose the latter, contact **TapInfluence**. Let us show you how easy and cost-effective it can be to put Influencer Marketing Automation to work for your brand or agency.

“The history of organizations is littered with the corpses of enterprises which failed to respond appropriately to the demands of the environment for change.”

-Katz and Kahn, 1966

Let's Talk

To learn more about TapInfluence's
influencer marketing platform:

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Visit: www.tapinfluence.com

