

Mobile Brand Safety Requires a Balanced Approach

Expertly managed services combined with the right technical solutions can address this complex problem



PART FOUR OF A SIX-PART SERIES BY CRISP MOBILE

From Procter & Gamble CMO Marc Pritchard's takedown of the "crappy" digital media supply chain to the string of advertiser boycotts of Google and YouTube, brand safety and ad fraud have been among the hottest marketing topics in 2017. Just last month, BuzzFeed uncovered a new scheme that used fraudulent ad traffic to steal millions of digital ad dollars from P&G, Unilever, Hershey's and Johnson & Johnson. It was yet another reminder that despite the many benefits of programmatic advertising, marketers who rely on the technology can suffer serious consequences if their campaigns are not properly executed or managed, or if pro-active measures are replaced with a "set it and forget it" mentality.

For major brands that advertise in mobile — very much including shopper marketers — this is a critical issue. Most mobile shopper campaigns involve programmatic ad buys, which are an efficient means of achieving the scale required to support proven tactics such as geo-targeting shoppers near a specific retailer's store locations. When campaigns are conducted on such a large scale involving thousands of websites and apps, however, there is a greater likelihood that unwanted ad placements may fall through the cracks.

"If a major packaged goods brand wants to run a large mobile program at scale to drive shoppers to the store, it is hard to do that without using programmatic buying," says Jim Selden, senior vice president of marketing at Crisp. "Overly

selective ad buys from specific properties offer more control over the advertising environment, but they are usually more expensive and can limit scale."

The economics of the programmatic marketplace render it prone to brand safety problems. The ads are typically purchased through a real-time bidding process using automated exchanges. While the platforms are transparent and offer tools and technical controls, there isn't a 100%, sure-fire way to prevent an ad from being placed next to objectionable content. For many marketers, the best answer has been to increase the practice of "whitelisting" pre-approved publishers and websites, or to layer their ad delivery system with technical solutions that filter bad content.

Yet whitelisting can also limit audience delivery and targeting ability to the detriment of campaign ROI. "It is a question of balancing brand safety concerns with the marketer's goals for KPIs," says Joe Riley, vice president of client services at Crisp. "Maintaining a positive brand affinity is critical, but at the end of the day, shopper marketers have to drive store traffic and generate sales. They must have, or tap into, the right level of expertise for conducting mobile campaigns, know what the tools are and where the risks come into play."

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Adds Selden: "For ad viewability and ad fraud specifically, these factors must be monitored for reasons of understanding real costs and to prevent outright scamming, but if your KPI is store product sales, and you're winning there, →

“For ad viewability and ad fraud... if your KPI is store product sales, and you’re winning there, you can assume that a lot of people have seen your ads.”
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you can assume that a lot of people have seen your ads. Brand safety is always a concern however, no matter how much revenue you generate, but if it comes at the expense of ROI, you’re back to square one.”

The Role of Technology

Marketers, quite rightly, often turn to technical solutions from third-party providers as a valuable part of a blend of approaches necessary to protect a brand. But it’s also important to have a clear understanding of their limitations across specific platforms, to deploy them intelligently and to view reports with an experienced eye. There are limits to tools such as the widely employed JavaScript tags from companies like Double Verify, Moat and Integral Ad Science.

Riley says measurement of ad viewability in a mobile app only works properly with apps that have downloaded the SDK (software development kit) from a measurement vendor. “Since many apps do not do this, the results will be inaccurate, and unless you are aware

of this, you will get a false reading on your campaigns,” he says. “Viewability measurement in mobile web environments, on the other hand, is far more accurate.”

Technical solutions are also often more effective in a display ad environment than a video-content environment, because it is easier to do a page-level text analysis than filter objectionable content in data-rich videos. That is particularly true for a heavily user-generated platform like YouTube, which has 1.3 billion users and sees an average of 400 hours of video content uploaded every minute.

“Marketers should not be tempted to think of technology as a panacea for all problems,” says Xavier Facon, chief technical officer at Crisp. “A technical solution that works in one channel can fail in another. Just because a solution is successful in a desktop environment, that doesn’t always mean it will work for a mobile campaign.”

Different targeting methods also carry varying degrees of risk. Targeting a shopper based on his or her demographic or purchasing behavior is an effective strategy, but it doesn’t do anything to mitigate brand risk.

Contextual targeting, however, can both improve performance and help avoid objectionable content. For example, a CPG brand that advertises a food product can use recipes, cooking and coupon content as a beneficial context for advertising while also steering a campaign away from risky content. “It is possible to choose sites via a contextual classification and still achieve a decent amount of scale and also not run into as many brand safety problems,” notes Facon.

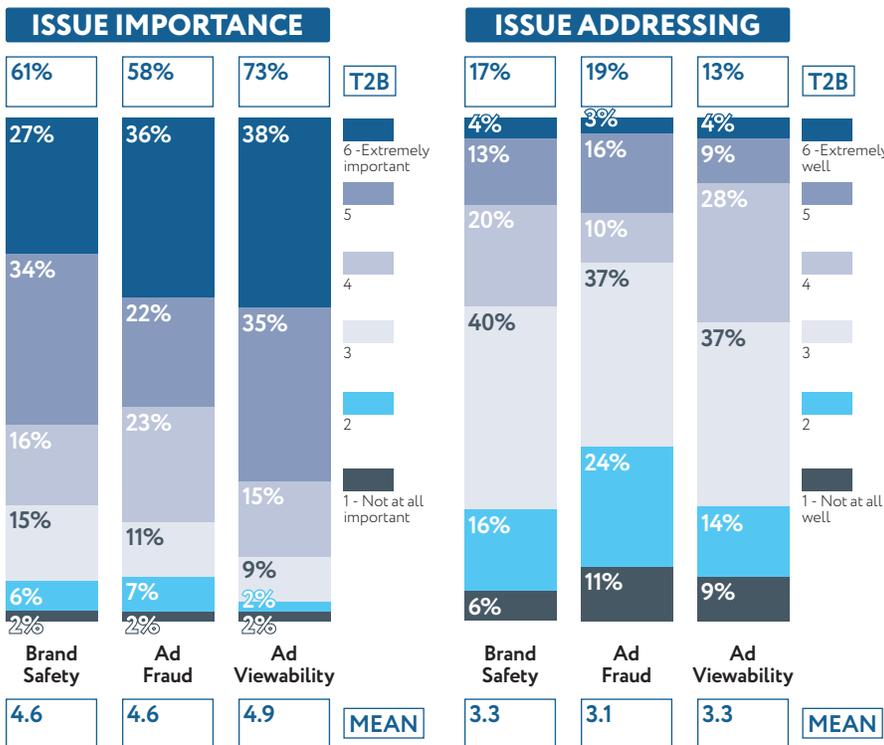
For all of these reasons, Crisp urges clients to adopt a balanced and diversified approach to brand safety — one that includes strategic planning, campaign optimization and human oversight of technical solutions. “Marketers should understand the methodologies that their vendors are using and focus on process and management,” says Facon, adding that Crisp handles planning, services and a pre- and post-launch quality assessment. “We have a sophisticated ad operation to support our expertise in developing and executing mobile campaigns.”

Viewability and Fraud

Earlier this year, news reports that Google and YouTube had inadvertently run ads from mainstream marketers near content containing hate speech and other extremist material came at a time when marketers were already taking a deeper look at issues that directly impact the →

Mobile Advertising Industry Issues

The 2017 Mobile Advertising & Marketing Study from Crisp and EnsembleIQ included how well the industry was addressing key issues. Ad viewability (e.g. ads served “below the fold” or out of sight of the intended audience) was the most important issue; however, respondents think it is being handled the least well compared to the other two issues.





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cost and ROI measurement of digital advertising — namely ad viewability and fraud.

Mobile marketers may have different priorities in these areas, given the unique parameters of the mobile ad environment. Ad viewability can be challenging given the size limitations of the mobile screen, but innovations such as adhesion technology have mitigated the problem for ads on the mobile Web by increasing the “stickiness” of banners — i.e., they remain in place as users scroll up and down the screen. This is critical because digital media is often purchased based on viewable impressions (currently defined by the Media Ratings Council as 50% of an ad’s pixels being viewable for one second or more). The rate at which ads are “viewed” affects ROI and budgeting calculations for mobile campaigns.

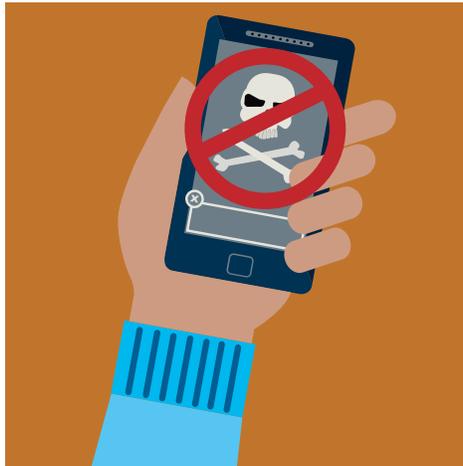
Meanwhile, adoption of industry standards like MRAID (Mobile Rich Media Ad Interface Definitions) has improved the overall user experience (including viewability) for ads that run within mobile applications. “Mobile apps go through a rigorous content approval process, especially on an IOS system,” notes Facon.

He continues that rich ads can provide a level of fraud prevention in and of themselves. The required sophistication of the

app and mobile browser inventory needed to render them (i.e., HTML5/rich media) make them less susceptible to fraud. “Bots either don’t know how to render the ad units or we can detect or prevent them from being rendered within the ad unit. It is a safer and much cleaner environment in which to run an ad.”

Research shows that marketers remain challenged when it comes to tackling all of these issues. According to the latest Mobile Advertising & Marketing survey from Crisp and EnsembleIQ (**discussed in part three**), brand safety, viewability and fraud were all considered somewhere between “very important” and “extremely important” issues, yet fewer than one in five respondents believed that the industry was addressing the problems effectively.

“Shopper marketing is closely tied to the fortunes of big brands, and there is a perception that major marketers are still struggling to conquer these complex issues,” observes Selden. He says that marketers should remain engaged in solutions but keep their eyes on the ultimate prize. “Even at the brand level, there is more of a focus today on measurable KPIs like store visits and sales. If you’re doing that effectively, while taking active steps to avoid many of the pitfalls of the digital ad market, you’re going to be in good shape. [crisp](#)”



Sidebar: A Brand Safety Checklist

1 Use technical solutions—but understand their limits. Invest in JavaScript tags and other third-party solutions, as they provide valuable tools and insights. But be aware of channel specific and other limitations. For example, in mobile, the blocking approaches used with many tags are too slow and may negatively impact campaign performance. And for mobile apps, no effective technology currently exists outside of tools that are far too difficult to scale.

2 Increase staff training and look for the right skill sets. Elevate the importance of training within your team and develop expertise through

all available sources. Emphasize data-centric skills and the ability to apply a forward-thinking mindset to the rapidly changing digital environment.

3 Choose partners with intimate knowledge of the space. Be clear about your brand’s risk tolerance but also its goals for scale and performance. Work with partners to implement your brand’s objectives, priorities and preferred strategies by applying the correct tools and approaches for the campaign.

4 Monitor new fraud detection tools and techniques. Get up to speed with industry initiatives that offer

support from non-commercial organizations such as the Trustworthy Accountability Group (TAG). Choose a small number of trusted partners. Vendors that are reacting quickly to ideas and offer TAG certification are a good bet.

5 Strike a balance. A marketer’s best results will come not from relying on any one strategy, but on having clear measures of success and using all of the tools at the brand’s disposal. Technology requires understanding and human oversight. Whitelisting must be placed in the context of the need for scale. KPI goals must be met throughout the campaign. Balance all of these correctly and everyone wins. [crisp](#)