

Critics wary as Google's Chrome begins an ad crackdown

February 14 2018, by Ryan Nakashima



This July 19, 2016, file photo shows the Google logo at the company's headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. Starting Thursday, Feb. 15, 2018, Google will start using its Chrome browser to reshape the web by eradicating ads it deems annoying or otherwise detrimental to users. It just so happens that many of Google's own ads will pretty much sail through its new filters. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez, File)

On Thursday, Google will begin using its Chrome browser to reshape the

web by eradicating ads it deems annoying or otherwise detrimental to users. It just so happens that many of Google's own most lucrative ads will pretty much sail through its new filters.

The move, which Google first floated back in June, is ostensibly aimed at making online advertising more tolerable by flagging sites that run annoying ads such as ones that auto-play video with sound. And it's using a big hammer: Chrome will start blocking all ads—including Google's own—on offending sites if they don't reform themselves.

There's some irony in that, given that Google's aim is partly to convince people to turn off their own ad-blocking software. These popular browser add-ons deprive publishers (and Google) of revenue by preventing ads from displaying.

Google vice president Rahul Roy-Chowdhury wrote in a blog post that the company aims to keep the web healthy by "filtering out disruptive ad experiences."

But the company's motives and methods are both under attack. Along with Facebook, Google dominates the online-advertising market; together they accounted for over 63 percent of the \$83 billion spent on digital ads in the U.S. last year, according to eMarketer. Google is also virtually synonymous with online search, and Chrome is the most popular browser on the web, with a roughly 60 percent market share .

To critics, Google's move looks less like a neighborhood cleanup than an assertion of dominance—and maybe even a crackdown on its competitors.

Start with what Google is targeting. Its effort focuses on 12 ad formats criticized by a group called the Coalition for Better Ads, whose members include Google, Facebook, News Corp. and the News Media Alliance,

which represents 2,000 newspapers in the U.S. and Canada. Among those blackballed formats are pop-ups, large ads that hover above the page, and ads that flash with bright background colors.

But those standards were intended to be voluntary, said Paul Boyle, [senior vice president](#) of public policy for the newspaper alliance that helped create them. Instead, he said, Google has appointed itself a global police officer that will turn the standards into de facto law.

Critics also note that the standards conspicuously exempt one of Google's one most significant forms of advertising—so-called pre-roll video ads, which run before videos on Google's YouTube.

Accusations of self-dealing have long haunted Google. Last June, European Union regulators hit it with a 2.4 billion euro (\$3 billion) fine for unfairly directing search results to its own shopping listings, from which it gets a direct cut of revenue. A similar Federal Trade Commission probe of Google ended in 2013 with a settlement and no fine .

More recently, the News Media Alliance has urged Congress to look at how Google pressures media outlets to put stories in its "Accelerated Mobile Pages" format, which also tightly restricts ad formats and provides Google a new source of revenue in exchange for giving publishers favored treatment in search results.

"It is troubling that one company becomes the regulator here for others," Boyle said. "But they have the market power to kind of dictate."

Google will phase in the restrictions in coming months, and disputes would go through the coalition, not Google. Users on sites where Chrome has blocked ads will see a notification and can opt to allow the ads if they want.

Website publishers have had months to prepare, yet many are still running afoul of the new standards. According to a recent search of Google's Ad Experience Report , 1,408 sites had "warning" or "failing" status. Some were targeted to have their ads to be shut down Thursday.

Sites flagged included niche interest sites like playstationlifestyle.net and bridalguide.com , as well as established newspapers such as The Hamilton Spectator in Canada. A number of porn sites also appeared.

Atlanta-based Gray Television Inc. had at least a dozen of its TV station websites flagged, including those belonging to stations WTVY, KMTV, KOLO, KWTX and WDTV. Gray didn't immediately reply to a request for comment. Spectator owner TorStar said it has fixed the problem.

© 2018 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Critics wary as Google's Chrome begins an ad crackdown (2018, February 14) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-critics-wary-google-chrome-ad.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--