Brand safety

a short guide

IAS Integral Ad Science

72% of CMOs are facing pressure from management to secure brand trust and gain tighter control over their reputation.

CMO Council report

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1. Brand safety and its challenges

What is brand safety?

Brand safety describes an opportunity to advertise in a digital environment where content aligns with a brand's image, values, and messaging. Brand-safe web pages are more conducive to helping advertisers achieve their goal of activating consumers to take action, through positive placement and adjacency.

What constitutes brand risk?

Brand risk refers to web pages that contain content that is damaging to brand image and reputation through association. This can have major implications, such as diminished brand equity or even leading consumers to boycott a brand.

What can be even more detrimental, however, is that advertising alongside inappropriate content may lead to inadvertently funding illegal activities and organizations. This happens when brands pay for media placements that unintentionally serve next to controversial content.

Risky content categories

You need to understand the type of content that may be harmful to your brand, and ensure that your advertising does not appear alongside it. There are key content categories that brands have identified as risky and you should avoid. These specific categories are listed by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) as:

Adult content

Facilitation of illegal activities

Controversial subjects

Copyright infringement

Drugs/alcohol/ controlled substances

Extreme graphic/ explicit violence

Incentivized manipulation of measurements

Hate/profanity

Nuisance/spyware/ malware

Political/religion

Unmoderated user- generated content

Identifying risk

Low risk content is generally acceptable for all ages and audiences, and typically does not contain anything offensive in nature (e.g. retail).

Moderate risk content is typically acceptable for most brands. Thought should be given to the subjective nature of content (e.g. tobacco).

High risk content is explicitly offensive. It is highly likely that this content is offensive to major brands (e.g. illegal or violent activities).

# When do brand safety issues arise?

It's important to remember that brand safety is not a new problem, and that it will never go away because ads live next to content. There will always be content that can be deemed inappropriate at some level, for some brands.

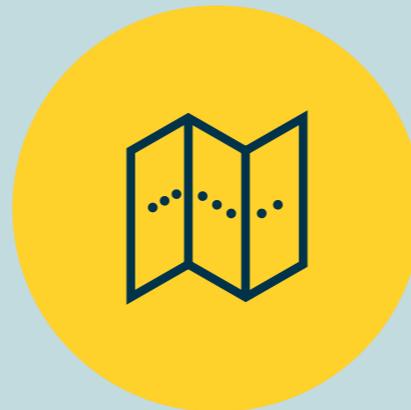**If brand safety is not a new problem, then why does risk still occur?**

News cycles
Appearing next to certain hard news may increase brand risk.
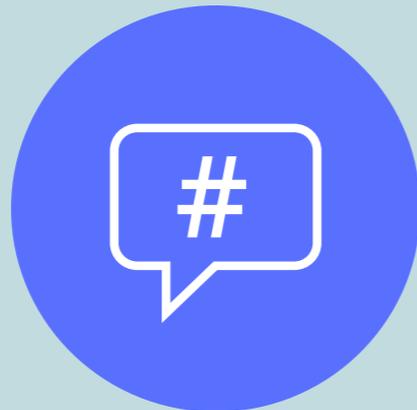
Social
Brand risk may arise because of the speed at which content is uploaded.

Programmatic
Risk levels can increase due to the automated nature of programmatic buying.

Targeted buys
When focus is placed on an audience at all costs, brand risk can increase.

Fake news
Fake news poses the latest brand risk threat to advertisers.

Spotlight:
The rise of fake news

What is fake news?
Fake news is any site that is deliberately creating or distributing inaccurate content as news. Fake news, although relatively new to the advertising industry, has proved to be a major challenge for advertisers who have found themselves unwillingly funding fake news sites. Ever since the presidential election cycle, we've seen a massive increase – globally – in fake news sites and content. And it isn't going away.

How does fake news impact brand safety?
There are different types of fake news: it can be explicitly controversial content, or it can be misleading, inaccurate information. Solutions are available today that deal with fake news, but the digital advertising industry remains burdened by misleading information. Fake news can pose a threat to a brand's reputation, and no one wants to pay for ads to appear alongside content that is inaccurate or false, or to be seen to be funding fake news sites.

"The consumer expectation is that they are reading 'real' news; nobody sets out to read 'fake' news."

Keith Grossman
Global Chief Revenue Officer,
Bloomberg Media

Want to learn more about fake news? Read this blog post by our Director of Product, Brad Timmers.

2. How to protect your campaign

Preventing brand risk using evidence-based models

Brand safety methodology that uses data science intelligence and modeling to weigh evidence from multiple data sources creates the most accurate and comprehensive brand safety solution. Web pages are crawled to identify risky content and collect data. Data is analyzed in order to score and rate pages so that brands easily understand where risk lies. Data scientists take this analysis and create models that can be applied to protect advertising campaigns online.
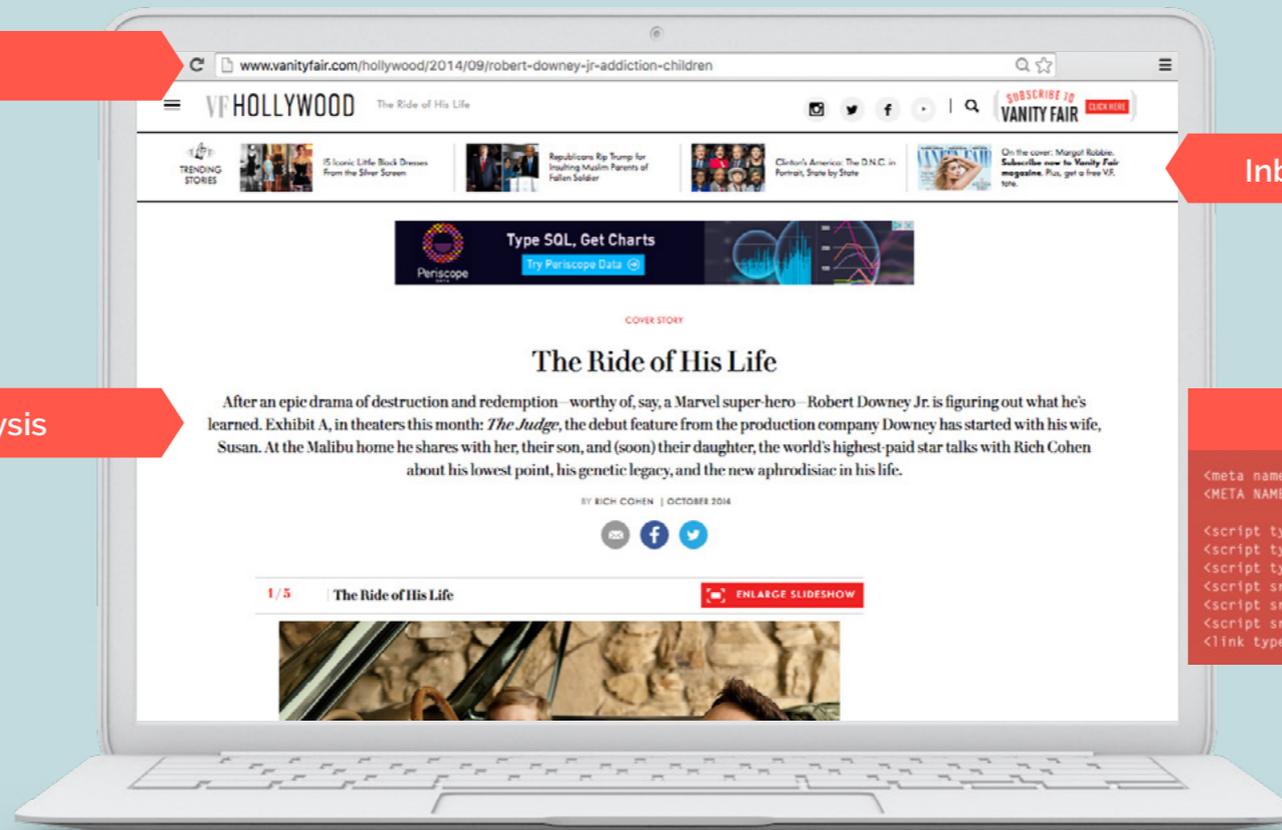
Because evidence-based models can be used to judge every potential impression, they offer the most comprehensive way to protect online advertising campaigns.
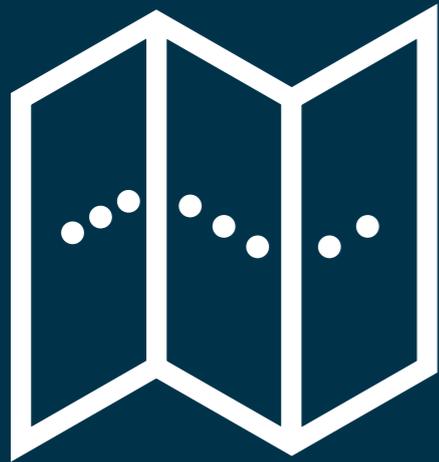
URL Analysis

Inbound/Outbound links

Semantics Analysis

Meta Data Analysis

Pre-bid targeting

Programmatic

Pre-bid targeting segments for brand safety are integrated within all major Demand Side Platforms (DSP), allowing you to target only safe impressions before ever placing a bid. You can choose segments that allow bidding on low and moderate-risk placements, across your entire campaign, regardless of device and format.

Blocking

Direct/Programmatic

Blocking prevents ads from serving on web pages that you deem risky or unsafe and this can be done in real time. Blocking can be enabled before the creative ad server is called which means that you will not pay for the impressions that did not serve. Blocking is the most effective tool to ensure brand campaigns perform efficiently.

Read about the top brand safety misconceptions, originally published in MarTech Advisor.

Using lists to set your brand safety parameters

Whitelists

Approved domains that you find acceptable to advertise on (regardless of any brand safety settings that may already be in place). When whitelists are created, it often indicates that there is a direct relationship between the publisher and a brand.

Blacklists

Domains that you are not willing to advertise on, regardless of any brand safety settings that may already be in place. So, although the verification technology may have rated a page as low risk, if the domain is on the blacklist, no ad will be served.

Keyword lists

A list of words you can create to avoid advertising on or in proximity to content related to that word. Some words and phrases that you may want to avoid may not be covered by content categories, such as competitor products, names of individual people, or specific scandals in the news. Each campaign can be given a custom list of keywords to avoid.

Considerations:

- Lists can reduce scale, which may result in campaigns not serving enough impressions to drive the intended actions.
- Utilizing black or whitelists may limit potentially impactful placements that are brand safe by not being included on either respective list type.
- Lists need to be chosen carefully and reviewed regularly.

3. Practical tips
How to get you started

Decide what your brand stands for.

Sounds simple, but it's critical in deciding on the associations you want to avoid – and what your threshold for risk is.

Choose the right partners.

Make sure your preferred partners allow for verification and enable it for every buy. Also, communicate your brand parameters to get the best course of action to ensure brand safety.

Enforce your strategy.

Work with independent third-party verification providers to ensure that every digital ad impression meets your brand safety standards.

8 top tips for brand safety success

1 "Risk" thresholds differ amongst brands – and can change. Define, customize and revisit often.

2 Know your partners and their capabilities. More knowledge will give you more peace of mind.

3 Different pages have different content topics, with different levels of risk. Domain-level protection is not enough. Make sure to have page-level protection.

4 Prevent your ads from serving next to risky content. Add blocking to your brand safety solution.

5 Don't just set it and forget it. Keep your blacklist and keyword lists up to date and review them regularly.

6 Give your programmatic performance a boost. Leverage pre-bid targeting segments to target away from risky content.

7 You need global protection. Make sure your brand safety partners have multi-language capabilities.

8 Don't forget about ad fraud. As news scandals pop up, you may want to add new keywords to your list.

10 questions you need answered when choosing a brand safety partner

1

Is this a global partner, with multi-language capabilities?

2

Is their solution and technology scalable, and able to work with billions of impressions?

3

Does this partner understand my business needs and challenges?

4

Do they have pre-bid targeting segments integrated within major DSPs?

5

Can they measure across all devices, formats, and environments?

6

Do they provide page-level protection?

7

Can their technology block impressions from appearing?

8

Do they remove fraud from their brand safety reporting?

9

Does this partner allow for verification and enable it for every buy?

10

Is this partner accredited by the Media Rating Council or working with an industry association?

4. Conclusion

Don't be the next brand safety headline.

Though brand safety is not a net-new concept, global events and a heightened sensitivity to unsavory ad placements have thrust brand safety into the national spotlight. Regardless of the challenges you might face, there are clear solutions that will help you and your brand mitigate risk and respond quickly when your reputation is on the line.

Don't be the next brand safety headline. Set a brand safety strategy and work with the right partners to enforce your brand safety guidelines so that your brand is protected from today's volatile socio-political climate.

→ To stay up to date on brand safety, visit **insider.integralads.com.**

About IAS

Integral Ad Science (IAS) is a global measurement and analytics company that builds verification, optimization, and analytics solutions to empower the advertising industry to invest with confidence and activate consumers everywhere, on every device. We solve the most pressing problems for brands, agencies, publishers, and technology companies by verifying that every impression has the opportunity to be effective, optimizing towards opportunities to consistently improve results, and analyzing digital's impact on consumer actions. Built on data science and engineering, IAS is headquartered in New York with global operations in 13 countries. Our growth and innovation have been recognized in Inc. 5000, Crain's Fast 50, Forbes America's Most Promising Companies, and I-COM's Smart Data Marketing Technology Company.

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