

ABC Interim Review of Content Verification Technology



Setting the standard

Securing a safer environment for online advertising – how far does CV technology deliver?

Trust is vital if the online advertising market is to reach its full potential; as the buying process shifts towards using automated decision-making, advertisers need to have confidence in online ad trading systems for the market to flourish.

We have been working with IASH (Internet Advertising Sales Houses) since 2006 to verify whether its members meet the self-regulatory code of conduct for online advertising sales houses. The learning from IASH is that the model works; a successful voluntary code of practice, underpinned by independent verification, brings trust, and consequently growth, to the market. Since the development of the IASH code, now in its 11th iteration, the online ad matrix has evolved and new Content Verification (CV) technology, which aims to safeguard ad placement, has become available.

In 2011 ABC was asked by JICWEBS to review the capabilities of CV products in order to deliver greater transparency to the industry in terms of the role played by CV technology in reducing the risk of misplaced advertising. Eight organisations submitted their products for review against criteria agreed by JICWEBS. The aim of our review was to test the ability of these products to block or report, in real time, the serving of an online ad onto destinations that have been defined in advance as inappropriate to a campaign. Inappropriate content in this context refers to any words deemed by the advertiser as unsuitable for the campaign, including brand conflicting content.

This interim report provides an initial snapshot of what each product delivered against the agreed criteria. Overall our testing showed that the eight CV products all had different, sometimes complementary, capabilities and they all reduced the risk of ad misplacement. The products tested varied in their ability to make decisions in real-time, which has implications where ads are being served alongside constantly changing content. It is notable that some of the tools were only able to respond to certain aspects of HTML code. Our testing was in controlled conditions with small scale delivery requirements. At scale operating, on a live campaign, the results may look different.

CV technology is a significant step towards securing a safer environment for online advertising but needs to be seen in context and decision-making should not be left to

algorithms alone. The way systems are configured, inappropriate content schedules agreed, instructions applied, and how all this is maintained over time throughout the ad serving process are all key to the success of CV technology based solutions.

CV technology is part of a young and fast developing industry. What the CV products have achieved to date has been ground breaking and can rightly lay claim to helping to grow safer online ad placement. All the signs are that there will be significant ongoing development of the underlying technology. I believe that this, underpinned by industry certification to verify the capability of these solutions, will lead to ever greater industry trust and the realisation of the full potential within the digital advertising market.

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