



# GLOBAL STANDARDS FOR LOCAL MARKETS:

A Roadmap for Establishing Global Harmonization  
in Digital Advertising Industry Standards



## Introduction

The global digital advertising sector has grown significantly over the last 10 years. Today advertisers spend \$209bn<sup>1</sup> on digital platforms, including mobile and tablets. It is the largest medium available to advertisers enabling them to build brands, engage with existing customers and to seek out new ones.

As the industry has grown - boosted by new and innovative technology, evolving business models and changing user behaviour - so have the challenges it faces, such as user privacy and brand safety. These are global problems that can inhibit growth in virtually every market if not addressed effectively.

The effectiveness and efficiency of digital advertising is reliant on trust - both from a user and business point of view. That may mean using data responsibly, enabling a positive experience for users or in ensuring supply chain partners are legitimate and that the advertising is free of criminal activity.

Addressing these challenges is vital if further growth is to continue unimpeded without undermining the ad-funded business model. While the digital advertising sector has made strong progress in building a safer environment

for brands to advertise their goods and services around the world, efforts are often fragmented across major markets - non-existent in others. This experience has shown that, in order to achieve brand safety effectively, global challenges are best addressed by global standards.

This paper highlights the importance and benefits of a cross-industry global standards framework: a consistent and scalable approach across markets. It identifies the areas where industry programmes are being leveraged to solve global challenges - such as in the UK, France and USA - as well as opportunities for these initiatives to better reflect the culture, language and needs of the local market. We call this approach: 'Global Standards for Local Markets'.





## International Standards

Whilst every local digital advertising market is different, the internet is global. Many of the challenges faced by digital advertisers around the globe - such as tackling ad blocking, eliminating fraudulent traffic, combating malware, reducing ad-funded piracy and ensuring ads are viewable - are universal.

A consistent and scalable approach is therefore important and has significant benefits for marketers (effective return on investment), the supply chain (reduced compliance costs), the entire industry (trusted self-regulation) and to users themselves (a positive experience).

In 2015, a report<sup>2</sup> by Ernst & Young and IAB in the US found that, in working together to tackle criminal activity (invalid traffic, malvertising and infringed content), the digital advertising industry could save \$8.2bn each year. Research<sup>3</sup> by the US Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the anti-fraud specialist White Ops found that advertising fraud losses for 2017 are estimated to be \$6.5 billion globally. It is therefore important that efforts are cross-industry: including advertisers, agencies, ad intermediaries and publishers.

The sector has developed standards in the following areas:



**Ad Blocking:** Leading international trade associations and companies involved in digital media formed the Coalition for Better Ads (CBA)<sup>4</sup> in 2016 to improve users' experience with digital advertising. Based on user research in North America and Europe, the CBA published standards<sup>5</sup> in March 2017 to boost the user experience and prevent ad blocking. These standards have been widely adopted across Europe and North America and explicitly in several national initiatives, such as the IAB UK Gold Standard<sup>6</sup> and France's Digital Ad Trust<sup>7</sup> initiative. Whilst the new ad standards to improve the user experience and counter ad blocking are only just over a year old (at the time of writing) and still being tested in many markets, there are already early signs that things are improving. For example: research<sup>8</sup> by IAB UK in February 2018 found that the 24.6% of UK adults online who currently claim to use an ad blocker would be less likely to actually use it if the ad formats offered a better online experience and were more relevant to them.



**Fraudulent Traffic:** In 2014, the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's), the US Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and IAB US established the Trustworthy Accountability Group (TAG)<sup>9</sup>, a cross industry initiative to tackle criminal activity in digital advertising and promote brand safety. TAG has developed a Certified Against Fraud Programme<sup>10</sup> specifically to tackle the issue of advertising fraud in the digital advertising supply chain. The programme includes adhering to the General Invalid Traffic (GIVT) provisions of the Media Rating Council's (MRC) Invalid Traffic (IVT) Detection and Filtration Guidelines<sup>11</sup>. Elements of the initiative – such as the implementation of Ads.txt – have been incorporated into several national initiatives, such as the IAB UK Gold Standard and France's Digital Ad Trust.

According to research<sup>12</sup> conducted in the US in December 2017, IVT rates fell to 1.48% across more than 6.5bn display and video impressions when companies complied with the Certified Against Fraud Programme, compared to much higher industry average IVT rates. In fact the research found that advertising fraud falls by up to 83% in TAG Certified Against Fraud distribution channels compared to the broader industry average.



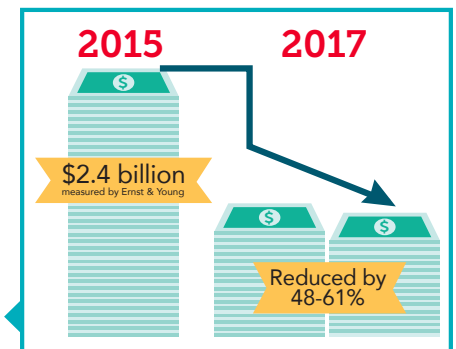
**Viewability:** The American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's), the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) and the IAB US established Making Measurement Make Sense (3MS)<sup>13</sup> in 2011 to address the issue of viewability. The 3MS principles cover the following areas: defining impressions; establishing audience currency; creating a standard classification of ad units; defining brand ad performance metrics; and establishing brand attitudinal measures. The principles have helped form the basis for viewability guidelines in the UK<sup>14</sup> – where tech vendors can sign up with JICWEBS and have their viewability tools certified to JICWEBS' Viewability Principles – at European Level<sup>15</sup>, and beyond.



**Malware:** TAG has developed a Certified Against Malware Programme<sup>16</sup> to prevent the distribution of malware via the digital advertising supply chain. The standards are based on the scanning of a reasonable percentage of total creative inventory.



**Ad-Funded Piracy:** TAG has also developed a Certified Against Piracy Programme<sup>17</sup> to help advertisers and agencies avoid damage to their brands from ad placement on digital properties that facilitate the distribution of pirated content and counterfeit goods. According to research<sup>18</sup> conducted in the US in October 2017, the anti-piracy steps taken by the digital advertising industry (such as the TAG Certified Against Piracy Programme) have reduced ad revenue for pirate sites by between 48 and 61%. This is notable progress against the \$2.4bn problem of infringing content measured by Ernst & Young in 2015.<sup>19</sup>



**Ad Misplacement:** The Joint Industry Committee for Web Standards (JICWEBS)<sup>20</sup> – a cross-industry self-regulatory initiative in the UK involving IAB UK, the Association of Online Publishers (AOP), ISBA – the voice of British Advertisers, and the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) – has developed the Digital Trading Standards Group (DTSG) Good Practice Principles for the Trading of Digital Display Advertising<sup>21</sup> in the UK market. The DTSG initiative aims to “significantly reduce the risk of the misplacement of display and audio advertising on digital media properties, uphold brand safety and protect the integrity of digital advertising”. The DTSG is one of the standards that underpins several UK trade body initiatives, such as the IAB UK Gold Standard and the AOP's Ad Quality Charter<sup>22</sup> and is supported by over 100 global and local companies. TAG and JICWEBS are committed to aligning<sup>23</sup> their approaches in tackling criminal activity and promoting brand safety in the UK and US markets.

In its June 2018 Global Media Charter<sup>24</sup>, the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) specifically highlighted eight areas of concern to brand advertisers, including ad fraud, brand safety, viewability, greater supply chain transparency, and an improved user experience. The WFA stated that *“these issues are best addressed via a global framework with local action”* and concluded *“the future of the digital media ecosystem is contingent on our ability to make serious and lasting changes to the way we do business. Urgent change is required.”*

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In addition to referencing other standards, such as the CBA and 3MS, the WFA’s Charter provides explicit support for TAG’s Certified Against Fraud Programme:

*“The Trustworthy Accountability Group (TAG) focuses on creating transparency in the relationships and transactions that undergird the digital ad industry. TAG’s ad fraud program has helped to focus efforts and resources on the elimination of this threat.”*

## Global Standards for Local Markets

Many companies recognize and are implementing (or have implemented) these standards to foster a universal approach across markets. However, the ‘company by company’ approach is not a ‘top down’ one: effective collaboration is required at the national level to ensure that the standards meet the needs of the entire local market and enable companies to partner toward those ends across the supply chain. The WFA’s Global Media Charter specifically highlights the importance of this approach. In his concluding remarks, Stephan Loerke, WFA CEO, said *“effective solutions at a local level can be adapted and scaled to good effect.”*

In some cases industry bodies in local markets (e.g. France’s Digital Ad Trust and UK trade bodies) are also leveraging global standards (and – where appropriate – adding local or regional standards) in a way that provides a more national flavour whilst enabling a harmonized approach across markets.

Annex One highlights the specific details of the French initiative, and how the cross-market standards fit with it.

## Conclusion

A consistent and scalable approach - via a cross-industry global standards framework - is required to tackle some of the key brand safety challenges in digital advertising.

Many existing industry programmes - such as those in the UK, France and the USA - are being leveraged to solve these global challenges.

As the digital advertising industry increases its focus on deploying global standards for local markets, there are opportunities to better reflect the culture, language and needs of the local market.



## About the Trustworthy Accountability Group

The Trustworthy Accountability Group (TAG) is the leading global certification program fighting criminal activity and increasing trust in the digital advertising industry. Created by the industry's top US trade organizations, TAG's mission is to eliminate fraudulent traffic, combat malware, prevent Internet piracy, and promote greater transparency in digital advertising. TAG advances those initiatives by bringing companies across the digital advertising supply chain together to set the highest standards. TAG is the first and only registered Information Sharing and Analysis Organization (ISAO) for the digital advertising industry. For more information on TAG, please visit [tagtoday.net](http://tagtoday.net).



## Annex One: An Example of 'Global Standards for Local Markets' - France's Digital Ad Trust



### France - Digital Ad Trust

- **Brand safety**  
Impressions blocked when they are served on pages that do not comply with IAB filters & do not exceed 2% of pages containing ads or served impressions.
- **Data privacy**  
Compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU).



### International Standards

- **Viewability**  
Reducing the numbers of non-viewable impressions, by implementing all available means to ensure that only ads that appear on the active screen are called.
- **Fraud**
  - Compliance with IAB / ABC spiders & bots list.
  - MRC audit of invalid traffic.
  - Implement ads.txt
- **User experience**
  - Adherence to LEAN standards
  - CBA standards / formats

### Footnotes:

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