Coalition for Better Ads

Better Ads Standards - Content Environments

(February 2018 - v1.0)

Introduction

The goal of the Coalition for Better Ads is to improve consumers' experience with online advertising by using consumer insights and cross-industry expertise to develop data-driven standards. The Coalition's Standards and Research Committee guides the development of research methodologies for particular digital content environments, as well as user research that helps identify the ad types that users least prefer.

In order to provide additional interpretative guidance to the Research, this document defines content environments under the Better Ads Standards. Each environment represents a context and format in which content is presented and ads are displayed. Because users may have different expectations depending on the device they are using or the type of content they are consuming, it is important to assess user preferences for ad experiences in each distinct environment.

Content environments:

Content environments are defined by a combination of the device used and the format of the content being viewed. Below is a table of the combinations reviewed by the Standards and Research Committee to develop test methodologies to understand user preferences for different ad experiences, as well as the current status of the Coalition's testing and roadmap (as of the date of this v 1.0 document):

Environment Combinations	**Platform/Device**		
Content Format	Mobile	Desktop	Other (e.g. set-top box, etc.)
Web	Completed	Completed	Not planned
In-stream video (short-form)	In progress		
In-stream video (long-form)	Not planned		
Multi-stream / Feed	To be tested		
App	Not planned		

Data from research conducted for each environment may show differing preferences for ad experiences that are used in multiple environments. As a result, the Better Ads Standards may reflect different tolerances for ad experiences depending where these experiences appear. For example, when users consumes video content, they are likely expecting sound, and so might have an different preferences as to the acceptance of ads with sound that is on by default, compared to when they are consuming a text-based article.

Web Environment[1]

Environment definition: mobile or desktop website content not otherwise defined in this document.

Ads are assessed according to the web environment if they:

- appear in web content contained inside an app (e.g. a WebView)
- extend beyond the player in an in-stream environment (in addition to being assessed according to any in-stream standard)
- are not part of any other environment

Video & interactive environments (short-form and long-form)[2]

Environment definition: a player environment which may display a variety of content including, but not limited to, streaming video, animation, gaming, slideshows, and music videos.

Video and interactive is divided into short-form (shorter than 10 minutes) and long-form (longer than 10 minutes), as per the IAB's "Long Form Video Overview".

Ads are assessed according to the video & interactive environment when they:

- are triggered by, executed by or dependent on the player
- at least partly overlap with the player environment
- are non-overlapping in time, i.e. no more than one ad appears in the same player environment at any given time
- appear before, during or after content

---

[1] The web environment may also be known as "in-page" or "display".

[2] These definitions borrow heavily from the IAB "Digital Video In-Stream Ad Format Guidelines."

Multi-stream / Feed Environment

Environment definition: mobile or desktop websites featuring multiple media players forming part of or all of the main content, with the main content defined as the primary focus of the page that a user most likely arrived at to view (sometimes referred to as feeds). The players must be persistent in nature, (i.e. if a user scrolls past them they are still present when the user scrolls back again).

Ads are assessed according to the multi-stream environment when they:

- are confined to the player environment (i.e. do not extend outside the player)
- are triggered by, executed by or dependent on the player
- are non-overlapping, (i.e. no more than one ad appears in the same player environment at any given time)

Note: In multi-stream environments, ads may appear in standalone players that do not feature content.

App environment

Environment definition: An application that has been downloaded onto a mobile, tablet or desktop device.

Ads are assessed according to the app environment when they:

- appear inside of an app
- are not contained within a WebView (which is considered to be a browser, and these ads would therefore subject to the relevant mobile / desktop standard)

Other

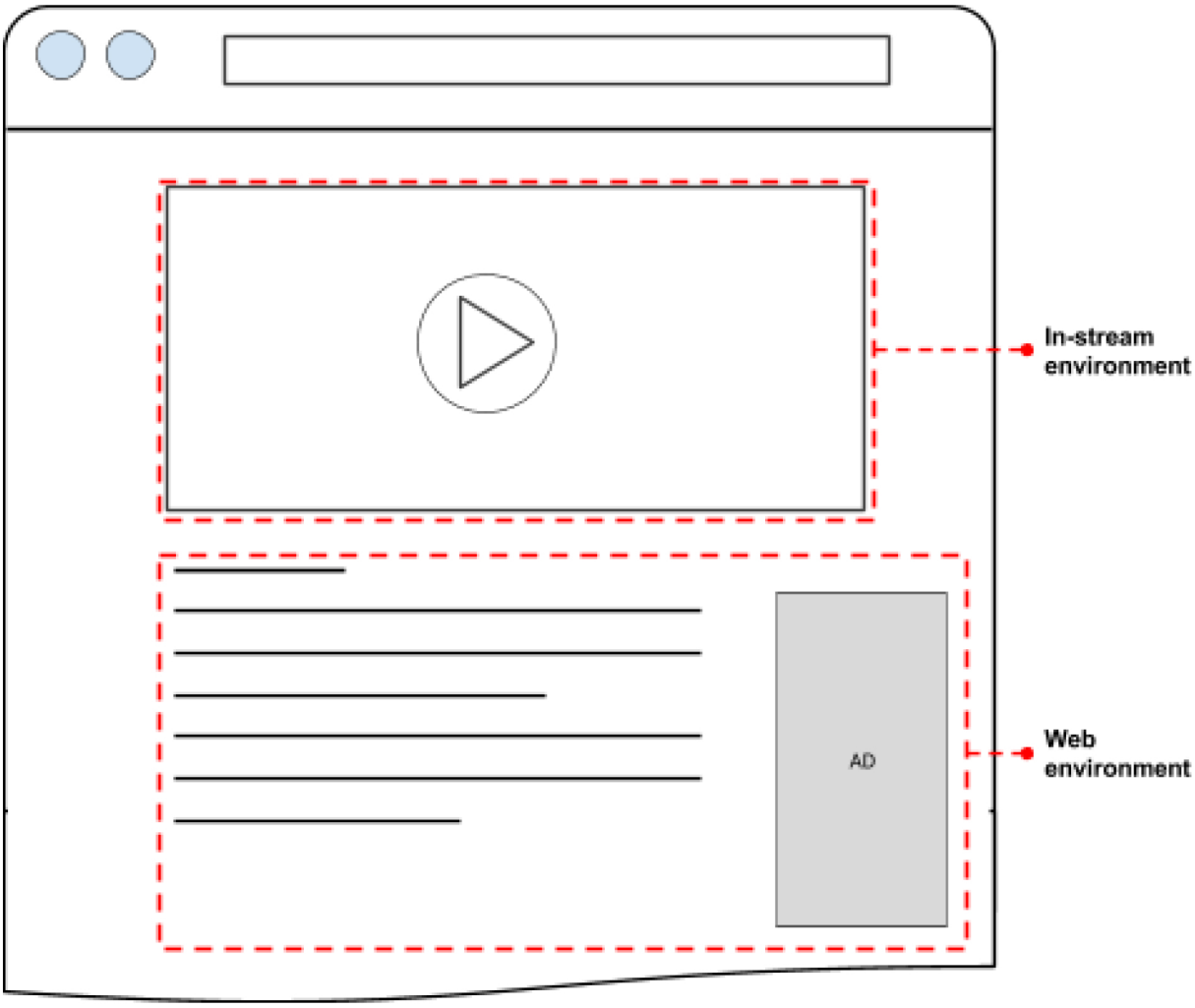
Ads and content may appear in a number of other environments or contexts. Several are defined above, and for some of those Better Ads Standards already exists. Those which do not reasonably belong to one of the defined environments above, therefore belong in the ‘Other’ group. These include, but are not limited to:

- Set-top boxes (OTT)
- App stores
- Smart-devices (e.g. smart watches)
- Audio (e.g. podcast, streaming music)

There are not currently any plans to test these ‘Other’ environments with regards to the Better Ads Standards.

Multiple environments can exist on a single page

It is possible that two or more distinct environments appear on the same page. Take the example of an article appearing on the desktop version of a news site. The page consists of a video player at the top with the written story underneath. This would be an example of a page that has two environments: In-stream video and desktop web. Ads *within* these two environments would be treated according to the in-stream and desktop web standards, respectively.



NOTE: If an ad experience overlaps between two environments, for example if a popup ad appears partially over a news article and a video at the same time, it will be held to the standard that is most strict. In this example the ad would be subject to the Better Ads Standards for Web, because there are no standards for video yet.