LEAN FAQs 2016

Internet Advertising Bureau UK

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What are the LEAN standards?

The LEAN standards are an industry initiative to improve the quality of digital advertising from a consumer's perspective. They are being developed as guidance for all stakeholders that produce and serve digital advertising to address the core reasons for some consumers installing ad blockers.

The Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) UK believes in an ad-funded internet, and knows that by offering better quality, leaner ads, everyone can be happy. We want to help brands reach their audiences and to provide revenue for publishers so they can continue to make their content, applications and services widely available for free or at little cost to the consumer.

These principles are a positive contribution to keep the ad funded internet in good health and will improve the output of the industry to make all forms of digital advertising more effective and more efficient.

What does LEAN stand for?

The 'L' in LEAN stands for 'Light', as in light file sizes and strict controls on data.

The 'E' for 'Encrypted' exists because we know that encryption vastly improves online security, and protects against issues like malware.

The 'A' for 'Ad choices' relates to the use of the AdChoices icon – a symbol underpinning the industry's initiative to provide users with greater transparency and control over online behavioural advertising (OBA). For more information please visit: www.youronlinechoices.eu

Finally, the 'N' in LEAN relates to the notion of 'Non'-invasive or disruptive formats. We are using industry and consumer feedback to inform what is deemed acceptable. The IAB UK is determined to reduce the instance of invasive advertising, which is known to drive ad blocking adoption rates. We know that consumers use ad blockers when they feel their online experience is interrupted by ads.

With these LEAN standards we have set out to define best practice parameters for the user experience as we continue to work towards an online ecosystem which offers choice, which empowers consumers and which strengthens the digital advertising industry. The first rule is to respect the consumer online, and to offer a quality, uncluttered experience.

Is this a UK-only initiative?

No, this is a global initiative. We are working with, and are supported by, the other 44 IABs around the world. Shaping the LEAN initiatives around lighter, encrypted, ad choice supported and non-invasive ads is a joint effort.

It may be appropriate to have some market-specific standards which take into account cultural differences but there will be a strong baseline of standard ad principles which remain the same across the globe.

Who has been involved in creating these standards?

IAB UK has played a pivotal role in the creation of LEAN standards, working alongside the IAB Tech Lab, IAB US & IAB Europe - with input from advertisers, media buying agencies and creative agencies, publishers, other media owners and ad tech companies. The whole supply chain involved in the buying and selling of advertising has been involved in this process.

On an ongoing basis, we are also working with other trade bodies in the UK – including The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), The Voice of British Advertisers (ISBA), The Association of Online Publishers (AOP) and The Advertising Association (AA). All of these organisations believe that the digital advertising industry must improve user experience to more closely align consumer expectations with the digital advertising formats that fuel content and services.

Why have they taken so long to be created?

This is a significant development for the industry, potentially changing the very foundations for how the web has been funded since its inception, and therefore needs to be right before it is rolled out. We are currently working on the detail with input from a broad range of industry stakeholders as well as consumers themselves. We have sought consumer views on a large scale, and global consensus about key principles which cross borders – from both an industry and an end user perspective. We have taken care to garner feedback from across the globe in order to discover commonalities – and, in some cases, differences - when it comes to consumer opinion about how ad experiences are delivered online. This is of course a large undertaking.

It's worth noting that online advertising has existed for more than two decades now, which in comparative terms, means the industry is in its infancy. Advertising has subsidised free access to services for many years, and has developed in a number of ways, and across formats in our now multi-device world. There is therefore a need for considerable detail when it comes to the assessment of how this ought to evolve.

How will they be enforced?

It is our intention to ask our members, whether buyers, sellers or intermediaries in the online advertising ecosystem – to sign a charter of good digital advertising best practice. We feel that by doing so we can ensure that these standards have a wide impact. We will also be asking our trade association partners to encourage their members to adopt and sign this charter. Those who sign the charter will have their names committed to the scheme.

Is there a form of accreditation or a stamp as part of LEAN?

We are reviewing the feasibility of accrediting the digital supply chain to ensure compliance. This requires further consultation with the industry once the shape of LEAN standards are determined.

What is the Charter I've heard about?

LEAN is one part of a wider Charter which the IAB is in the process of developing, on appropriate and effective advertising, or digital advertising best practice. The Charter is comprised of high level principles which commit signatories to delivering advertising that respects the user experience at all times.

By committing to the wider Charter, companies will also be committing to the LEAN principles within it and signatories of the Charter will commit themselves to assuring respect for, and promotion of the whole Charter.

The Charter also includes a call-to-action with regards to the refinement of principles on an ongoing basis, as technology and online habits continue to develop. For example, with voice search growing, the industry needs to consider what defines a good ad experience within the context of audio search.

The IAB intends to finalise this Charter by October 2016. The aim is that adherence to the Charter will lead to greater consumer trust.

Will LEAN really have an impact? How will this be measured?

The IAB believes that this will ultimately have an impact, especially on mobile. Mobile has, in the past, become particularly commoditized. With prices often significantly less than on desktop, we have seen some companies seek out short-term revenues, and this has tended to involve the use of more interruptive formats on these devices. However, there are also some erroneous formats on desktop, with excessive use of third-party data and tracking that significantly slow down the user experience.

We believe the LEAN standards will address these formats and techniques to optimise the user experience and tackle the major reason why consumers block ads.

In addition to the LEAN ads and the Charter, we are considering enforcement and audit as ways to measure impact. Through continued research we will continue to measure the ad blocking rate in the UK whilst measuring the industry's adherence to LEAN.

Finally, we will continue to ask users how they rate their experiences online.

How do I sign up for LEAN?

The LEAN principles will be published in the autumn of 2016, after which we will be asking members to sign-up. However, we are in discussion with members on an ongoing basis as we form these and any interested parties should contact the IAB UK for more information, info@iabuk.net.

Where can I go for more information?

There is a section on the IAB UK site dedicated to issues around ad blocking which can be found at www.iabuk.net/adblocking. This is frequently updated with news and further information.

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