

# **IAB Affiliate Marketing Council Publisher Standards Charter**

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Affiliate marketing is an established part of the digital marketing mix. Working with advertisers, publishers, affiliate marketing networks, media agencies and others, the IAB's Affiliate Marketing Council (AMC) is working to ensure the continued growth of the industry and the promotion of industry standards.

Affiliate marketing is a partnership and transparency is fundamental to managing quality assurance and maintaining standards across a diver industry. Transparency improves the appeal and effectiveness of affiliate marketing and helps avoid misunderstandings and possible breaches of applicable terms and conditions.

This best practice document offers guidance on how publishers can strengthen their relationships with advertisers. It should be viewed as one of the first documents to visit for those new to affiliate marketing or those looking to ensure they are operating in accordance with best industry practice. More information on what constitutes a publisher and the key attributes of the publisher/advertiser relationship is set out below.

The underlying goal is to protect all parties involved, the commissions and partnerships that publishers rely on, the advertisers' brand and customers and the overall success of the industry.

This document outlines some of the key practices that publishers should adopt when promoting advertisers or working with advertisers' affiliate marketing networks or media agencies.

Please bear in mind that not all of these categories will be relevant to every publisher, so guidance from the relevant affiliate marketing network is recommended if in doubt.

The following document is supported by the member affiliate marketing networks of the Affiliate Marketing Council, namely, Affiliate Window, Affilinet, Commission Junction, OMG, Rakuten Linkshare, Omnicom Tradedoubler and Webgains.

## **1. An Short Introduction to Affiliate Marketing**

In the performance marketing industry, an advertiser (also known as a merchant) is an online seller which is seeking to promote itself or its products or services. Advertisers may do this themselves or through a media agency.

A publisher (also known as an affiliate) is a business which displays or promotes the products and services of an advertiser. Some publishers generate potential sales leads for an online retailer, rather than generate sales. In return the publisher receives a performance-based commission.

Successful publishers are able to attract quality internet traffic to the advertisements they display or distribute, thereby increasing advertiser sales. Publishers attract internet

traffic in a number of ways. The key methods are by offering, whether through websites, emails, apps or other means:

- a) an incentive, such as cashback or redeemable points, to individuals which buy advertiser's products through the publisher website;
- b) discounts in the form of vouchers for products sold by advertisers;
- c) a service, such as price comparison; and/or
- d) quality content.

Publishers generally promote advertisers through an affiliate marketing network, which introduces publishers to advertisers, provides independent tracking of internet traffic and resulting sales, and facilitates the payment of commissions.

## **2. What are the Key Features of the Publisher/Advertiser Relationship?**

Publishers which promote advertisers through an affiliate marketing network will be required to agree to that affiliate marketing network's terms and conditions of business. Advertisers or their media agencies may impose further terms and conditions which apply to the promotion of that advertiser. Publishers should only promote an advertiser if they are capable of adhering to the terms required by that advertiser.

Advertisers have the opportunity to confirm or deny whether they agree a commission is payable in respect of a sale generated by a publisher. This is a process known as validation and enables advertisers to refuse commission if, for example, a sale is later returned; subject of a chargeback or found to have been generated in breach of any applicable terms and conditions. Publishers should ensure they are aware of the basis on which sales are validated and take this into consideration when deciding which advertisers to promote.

Internet traffic is tracked from the publisher website to the advertiser website by using cookies (or similar technologies). Where multiple publishers refer the same potential buyer to the same advertiser, the publisher with the most recently served cookie will ordinarily receive the commission. Publishers which serve earlier cookies do not ordinarily receive any commission.

## **3. Duty to the Public**

By promoting advertisers and their goods and services, publishers are providing a service to the public as well as advertisers. Publishers form a key part of the online marketing process and are often the first to come into contact with a consumer engaging with an advertiser's sales channel. Publishers should take a responsible approach when providing this service to consumers, ensuring that consumers' needs are accounted for and that overall integrity is maintained (for instance, the integrity of the advertiser's brand).

A publisher must always act fairly and transparently with consumers. Not only must publishers be open with consumers, but that openness must take into consideration a

consumer's likely expectations. This means that a publisher must accurately reproduce information it receives from or on behalf of advertisers, doing so in a way which is easy to understand and will not be misleading. The overall objective is to ensure that the online experience provided by the publisher is consistent with what the advertiser and the consumer expect.

Publishers must always comply with applicable law, especially regulations intended to protect the public. For example, publishers should comply with the regulations regarding the use of cookies, retargeting and other forms of tracking, as well as data protection. Publishers should comply with advertising and fair trading standards and bear in mind that additional advertising standards apply to the marketing of particular goods and services. Publishers should also comply with appropriate self-regulation, such as the 'Your Online Choices' initiative to identify retargeted advertising, which is operated by the European Interactive Digital Advertising Alliance.

Publishers should apply different methods for protecting consumers, depending on their particular business models. For example, a voucher-code publisher should ensure that the key terms applicable to a voucher are made clear to the consumer, whereas a content publisher should consider how to identify paid advertorials within their content.

Publishers should consider letting consumers know if they are compliant with this Publisher Standards Charter.

#### **4. Dealing with Affiliate Marketing Networks and Advertisers**

Publishers should work closely with the affiliate marketing network and advertisers that they engage with, to help ensure that the relationship is one of proactive collaboration. Publishers should make sure that all information they provide to affiliate marketing networks and advertisers is correct and is kept up to date. This is especially important with regard to contact and payment information.

By explaining how their business operates to affiliate marketing networks, publishers can help affiliate marketing networks to ensure effective introductions to appropriate advertisers. Similarly, by explaining how their business operates to advertisers, publishers can help advertisers to optimise their affiliate marketing campaigns, generating more sales and therefore more commissions.

When dealing with advertisers, publishers should always keep in mind any particular terms that an advertiser applies to its marketing programme, or to the marketing of particular products. These terms may be subject to change on a campaign by campaign basis and publishers should be able to respond to those changes quickly. Successful advertiser/publisher relationships can be of huge reward to both parties. It is important for both publishers and advertisers to invest time in ensuring good working relationships with each other.

When dealing with affiliate marketing networks, publishers should make the most of the technical infrastructure that the affiliate marketing networks provide. This infrastructure includes tracking code, intranets, relationships with network partners and information about advertisers. Publishers should be aware of how best to make use of this

infrastructure, as this can help to maintain consistent methods of dealing with affiliate marketing networks.

Each affiliate marketing network operates slightly differently and each has its own preferred way of working with publishers. Each affiliate marketing network also has its own terms for publishers and these may change from time to time. Publishers should stay up to date with changes to the terms of each of the affiliate marketing networks they deal with.

## 5. Technical Practices

Publishers should seek to drive sales that add value to advertisers' businesses. Publishers should not use unauthorised brand bidding or domain squatting to generate commissions.

Publishers should employ ethical promotional method. Publishers should not use technical means to earn commissions in respect of sales or leads which are not genuine or which otherwise do not comply with the standards required or reasonably expected by advertisers. Spam, adware, cookie stuffing, unauthorised brand bidding and domain squatting are indicative examples of technical practices that are prohibited.

## 6. Conclusion

The best practice guidance in this document is not intended as restrictive or exhaustive; instead outlines how a publisher can properly form part of an advertiser's affiliate marketing programme.

In order to ensure the success of the affiliate marketing channel, and the apportionment of even larger budgets to spending on publisher commissions, it is vital that advertisers view their relationships with publishers as adding value. Good partnerships with advertisers help to make the value of the affiliate marketing channel clear. Always consult with advertisers, affiliate marketing networks, and/or media agencies if any assistance is required to achieve this.

Reading this document and adhering to the best practice principles shows a sign of your commitment to affiliate marketing in accordance with best practice. All AMC member affiliate marketing networks have agreed to adopt and enforce the principles and spirit of this Publisher Standards Charter under their standard terms of business.

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### Relevant documents:

#### [IAB Affiliate Advertiser Standards Charter Voucher Code of Conduct](#)

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