



Google AdSense

Taking Another Look at a Powerful Internet Revenue Source

By
James L. Paris

OK...Google AdSense. This is one of those important features of Internet marketing that we will revisit from time to time, and so we want to do that here in this issue. The AdSense affiliate program remains a solid way by which you can passively earn real money simply from having a website or blog, and so it's something to which we have to give due attention in our various discussions.

If you're a veteran of Internet marketing, you know what an AdSense ad looks like, but if you're fairly new to all of this, let me explain briefly. A good deal of the time, when you visit a website or blog, you will see small, clickable ads that basically dot the pages of the site you're visiting. The ads are often-times not proprietary ads of the person who owns that site, but, rather, are ads that appear automatically and that reflect the general theme of the web page on which they sit. They are engineered to appear that way, and this engineering is done by the company that has made the ad opportunity available in the first place. Here, we're going to talk about Google's program, because it is the biggest and the best of these.

As it goes, if you're intrigued by the small ad that you see on the page you're visiting and decide to click on it to learn more, you will be taken directly to the site of the party that paid to put the ad there. When you *do* that,

the owner of the website on which the ad appears...the place where you saw it...receives a small sum of money in exchange for your "click." This is his compensation for allowing the ads to be posted on his site. This person, then, would be a participant in the Google AdSense program, and it's something that is quite available to you, as well.

As for what is earned when someone clicks on ads posted to your site, it can vary fairly widely—I can tell you that when people click on the Google ads that appear at my Christian Money.com site, we receive about \$2 for each click.

One of the Biggest Mistakes You Can Make

So you've signed up with Google AdSense (www.adsense.com) and learned how to put the ads on your website or blog...perhaps on your own, through our proprietary training, or via some other resource...and once you have the ads on there, you decide that you've done your part; now, all you have to do is watch and wait, and you assume that whatever the results are that you realize, well, that's it—they are what they are.

That's not true, and taking that approach is one of the biggest mistakes you can make with this, because there are so many different

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things that you can do to try to tweak your ad. For example, you can change the ad's font color; you can change the place on the page on which the ad appears; you can select a different size of ad; and lots more. The key to this is to test different scenarios to see what works best for you.

Now, I'm going to give you a general rule of thumb for starters, and then we're going to get into some specifics. The general rule of thumb is that you want to be sure to put these ads on your website in such a way that they do not really stand out as being ads; you don't want the ads to look like ads. Why is that? Well, most people, it's safe to say, are looking for *content* when they are on the Internet; they're not looking for ads. So, what happens is that when people are browsing through cyberspace, the general tendency is to steer away from ads that we see. As a matter of fact, people are so ad-averse when they're on the Internet that they sort of learn to train their eyes and brain to avoid the text or graphics of anything that looks like an ad as soon as it enters the general field of vision. There is actually a term for this in Internet marketing: *ad blindness*. With ad blindness, people block out the ads when they're at a site and only truly "see" the non-ad content.

The easiest way for someone to avoid an ad is when they're presented with the good, ol' banner ad. Banner ads are those giant, graphical ads that often appear at the tops of websites, and while they still have their place, they are also the easiest to avoid by

those prone to ad blindness. So rule #1, we can say, is to stay away from the graphical ads when working with Google AdSense. When you get into your AdSense control panel, you can choose between text ads and graphic ads. Honestly, I don't know of any scenario wherein it would be better for you to pick graphical ads, so while it's available to you as an option, I would advise staying away from them—text ads are always going to pull a lot better than graphical ads, and it's fair to say that the overriding reason for this is the ad awareness that all Internet browsers (meaning, the people who browse the Internet) quickly develop; text ads just don't jump out as *being* ads quite so obviously.

Referring back to the general rule of thumb we touched on a little earlier, it is very important that you be sure to more cleverly display these text ads in such a way that they don't really look like ads at all. Given that, what are some of the things you can do to really make that happen?

For starters you can make the font size of your Google AdSense ads to be similar in color, style, and size to the font you're using on the page on which the ads are appearing. Additionally, you can see to it that the background of your ad blocks is the same color as the background color of your web page. Just doing those two things right there will help you to realize a much higher number of clicks than you would otherwise.

While it's important that the ads blend with your webpage on the basis of style and color,

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it's also very important that the ads are placed properly on your pages. If you go on over to the Google AdSense website, you will find a "heat map" (under the section *Working with my Ads*) that tells you the best places on a given site on which to place the ads. You will see, if you look there, that, according to Google, the strongest positions on a page, all things being equal, is the top of a page, the top-center of a page, and the left-hand side bar. You should also certainly take the time to visit other sites for the express purpose of seeing what others are doing, particularly at sites that are popular.

I can tell you that, for me, a few, different things work well. For one thing, I've had good success using *half-sized* banners, in conjunction with small graphics. If you take a look at Christian Money.com, you will see that I use ads that way here and there. Now, I know I talked previously about staying away from banner ads for the purposes of Google AdSense, and that is generally correct, but a half-sized banner ad is a little different. Half-sized banner ads are not commonly used, and because of that relative rarity, combined with the fact that they are still somewhat prominent without being imposing, the use of these kinds of banner ads can actually yield good results.

Let me mention something else that's useful, and it is something that I learned through trial and error. Recently, I had been noticing that my revenue from Google AdSense had been dropping off. Now, at this point, I have so many different revenue sources going that I'm not really thinking too much about it, but it certainly doesn't mean I don't want to turn things around. Well, I went back and checked my records, and I noticed that I had stopped doing something a few months back

that had actually been generating good results for me as far as AdSense revenue goes. For quite a while, I had been inserting Google AdSense ads directly into the body of my blog articles through a mechanism known as a "text wrap," which is what to use when you want to make the ads appear like they're an intrinsic part of the article. As I said, I had allowed myself to get away from doing this, but I'm back to it now. It is one more step in the direction of "commingling" ads and content, and being able to do that as much as possible is a big key to success at all of this.

Testing

Testing is very, very important. If you're not getting the results you seek, change some things; change the color of your text, try changing the position of the ads on a given page, or make other changes. I can tell you that one of the biggest reasons that people do not succeed at a number of different aspects of Internet marketing, including this one, is that they adopt a "set it and forget it" approach to all of this. You cannot do that here if you want to be successful. It is rare that you will not have to tweak your AdSense settings from time to time in order to preserve realizing the best results possible.

Here's an idea of how impactful changes to your AdSense settings can be. There are people getting as many as 10 to 15 percent of the visitors to their pages to click on an ad—10 to 15%! That said, there are many others who are seeing fewer than one percent of the visitors to their pages clicking on ads...sometimes barely any at all. What's the difference? Well, it's what you probably suspect it is—those people who are regularly seeing a high rate of clicks are paying close

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attention to the analytics associated with their Google AdSense, and making changes to try different settings and placements, as appropriate. If you're not having great success with your results, you *have* to be sure you're trying different things, because it *can* work very well.

Before I leave this, let me clarify what your successful manipulation of AdSense settings can and cannot do. Remember that the number of AdSense clicks you receive are also in large measure a function of the number of page visitors you have; that is, while you can make changes to your settings to increase the percentage of visitors who click through on the ads, if you're averaging five visitors to your page each day, your ad revenue won't see much of a change until you solve that overriding problem.

AdSense Terms of Service

This is something of which you always want to be particularly aware, especially if you're new to all of this. The number one thing that people will do (unintentionally, mind you) to get themselves kicked out of the AdSense program is that they will click on their own ads (or tell other people they know to click on their ads). I receive a LOT of emails from people asking how Google knows that people are clicking on their own ads, which suggests to me that some of you otherwise nice folks out there may be doing that very thing, or at least giving it some consideration.

Remember that Google is an enormous company, and it makes almost all of its money on this pay-per-click business model. Accordingly, you have to assume that the company is going to maintain some rather sophisticated fraud control and protection. Here's a

couple of things that they're going to do: They're going to look at the IP addresses of those people clicking on the ads. When their mechanism sees the same person clicking on an ad multiple times, they will basically know that it's very likely someone trying to "game" the system, and will go further on that cue to verify it is someone clicking on his own ad. Some have wondered if Google would be able to figure out what's going on if they do their self-clicking from another computer...say, on one at an Internet café or perhaps on one of the computers at the local library. Here's the deal—you can try to outwit the system, but the bottom line is that Google is going to be able to pick up on any unusual activity that falls outside of the norm. Ultimately, that's all they need to see to begin investigating your account, and the truth is they can pretty much do what they want to on that basis. Let's say you live in California, and you call your cousin who lives in New York and ask him to click on your ads many times over. Again, all Google really needs to know is that your account is subject to unusual activity, and will suspend it on that basis. Think about it logically—for what legitimate purpose would the same person, or computer, click on the same Google ad over and over again? There isn't one, and Google knows it.

Oh, and here's something else people will try: they will actually write, in the text of their pages, instructions to visitors to click on their ads, like, "Please be sure to click on these ads right here," and will have some indicator as to where they want the page visitor to click. Google has ways of catching that, as well.

The idea behind these ads, of course, is that people will click on them if they're inter-

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ested, at least initially, in what seems to be offered, and you're not supposed to in any way facilitate any "disingenuous clicking," as it were. To understand why this is such a big deal, you have to remember that the ads that appear on your site through AdSense are from real advertisers who are paying Google for their placement; while each ad click means money to you, each ad click *costs* those advertisers. The advertisers have to know that each click on that ad results in a truly interested party wanting to learn more about what is being offered, and when those ads are clicked on dishonestly, it's regarded as being tantamount to theft from those advertisers; that's why Google is so harsh about how it deals with Terms of Service violators.

If you're serious about succeeding as an Internet marketer, why would you take the risk of having your account closed like that? Particularly because if your account *is* closed, there's very little you can do about it. You could go with another pay-per-click opportunity, but Google is really the biggest and the best of those. There's no hearing process or anything like that on which you can rely in an attempt to have your account privileges restored. Again, Google is very concerned that their advertisers maintain the highest, most sincerely justified belief in the program's integrity, so they will not mess around with this. That said, it's a good idea for you to be familiar with the Terms of Service of the AdSense program. The section isn't that long, and the whole Google AdSense "Help" area is actually quite good and very useful.

Tampering with the HTML Code

This is a subject about which some of my students will ask me from time to time. They

will go into their AdSense control panels, they'll get the HTML code, put it on a notepad, and because they want to change how the ad looks, they'll start trying to modify that code. Doing that is against the Terms of Service; you're not allowed to make changes to the code. If you want to change how your ads look, you do that inside your AdSense control panel. Again, you can change the font, the style of the ad, the colors, the dimensions of the ads, etc. You can do all of that sort of thing, and when you're finished, you can copy the HTML code for that ad unit that you've created (or re-created). Whatever you do, however, do NOT modify the HTML code.

Link Units

Let's talk for a bit about link units. Link units are another form of Google AdSense ads. Specifically, they're clickable topics that are indicated on your website, and these topics, like the ads that directly adorn your page, are thematically in keeping with what your webpage is all about. In terms of the pay-per-click aspect of this, though, it is actually a *two-step* process: the first step occurs when the visitor clicks on the topic that interests him, and then when the visitor clicks on the ads that appear from clicking on the topic, that's the point at which revenue will result.

The advantage to using link units is that they do not stand out on your page as *being* ads. The truth is that many people will have no idea that they are clicking on ads...or at least the first step to getting to an ad...until they end up on the ad page.

I have to tell you that I have not, historically, seen many of our students use this link unit

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mechanism, and I think that's a big mistake; this is a very good way to generate clicks. The argument against it is that it takes two clicks on behalf of the site visitor to generate a payment to you, whereas with the other, more traditional Google AdSense ads, only that first click is needed. Technically speaking, that's true, of course, but don't lose sight of the forest for the trees here. What your overall goal should be is to assemble Google AdSense mechanisms in such a way that one or the other form they take will resonate with as many site visitors as possible. The more traditional-looking ads may catch the interest of some visitors in the way that the link unit topics do not; conversely, the link unit topics, because they are just a list of topics, may get attention from someone who is otherwise disinclined to click on the others. The point is that the link units are another option that's available to you, and one that has proven effective for a lot of people.

Finding Top-Paying AdSense Words & Phrases

If you search for the phrase "top-paying AdSense words," you will see returned a lot of interesting sites. The reason I mention this is because if you're not making enough money from your Google AdSense efforts, and you're doing all of the things I'm talking about...your ads are blending in, they're in the right position, they're the right size, you're using text ads...it could be that the topic of your site is not conducive to the higher-paying Google AdSense phrases. Whenever I do my free Internet marketing workshops, I always tell people about my ads that pay me about \$2 whenever someone clicks, and one of the questions I always get is, "Will I average \$2 per click if I set this up on my site?" Well, the answer is that you

can average less, and you can average more. Remember that what I average has really nothing to do with who I am, my experience, my intelligence (or perhaps lack thereof), but what determines my payout in this is the theme of my site and how that affects the kinds of ads that are populated by the AdSense mechanism. Christian Money.com, is, of course, themed on the topic of Christian-oriented finance; the ads on the pages of that site are going to correspond to that topic, and they will pay whatever the market says they will pay. However, those are not necessarily in keeping with the highest-paying words and phrases out there.

Does this mean that you should change the theme of your site in order to have one that is more closely aligned with better-paying words and phrases? Well, if you're basically doing everything else right, for the most part, then the answer might be, "Maybe." If your website is themed in such a way that it largely corresponds to lower-paying words and phrases, there's not much you can do about that, short of changing the theme of your site. This is an important point, because it reminds us that building a website exclusively on the basis of what we enjoy most may not always dovetail nicely with that site's ability to generate income. That's something you may have to consider if your per-click revenue is unacceptably low.

If you're satisfied with AdSense representing just one of many income sources, then you may decide against putting a significant amount of energy into fine-tuning all of this. However, if you like the potential AdSense offers, and want it to serve as a cornerstone of your Internet marketing revenue, then you would do well to make working on AdSense a regular focus of your efforts.

Federal Trade Commission Compliance

How to Stay “Inside the Lines” as a Blogger

By

James L. Paris

You might have missed this, but back in the Fall of 2009, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) came up with some rules that were really written to target people who have Internet businesses, and, specifically, bloggers. Now, while this is not something about which I believe we should be terribly worried, I think it’s fair for us to have some level of concern about it, and I want to share with you here my research and my thoughts about all of this.

“FTC to Fine Bloggers up to \$11,000 for Not Disclosing Payments”

This is an actual headline from an article announcing the FTC rule changes when they first came out. Here’s what this is really all about: If a blogger is writing a blog post, and is, in the post, recommending something for which he is compensated, the FTC wants that fact to be disclosed; in other words, the government wants it to be disclosed when the blogger may have a *conflict of interest* when recommending a product or service.

This whole issue speaks to the government’s struggle over how to deal with the *new media*; of course, media is no longer comprised of simply radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Now, we have this creature called the Internet, and along with it websites and blogs, and the government is a bit late to all of this, so this is partly their initial, meaningful response to what they believe is a

new kind of problem...the problem of the “everyman journalist,” who, even though he may not write for an established news organ, still has great influence over many people because of the new media platforms that now exist. So-called professional journalists have had to deal with these issues all along, but now the matter of “fraudulent presentations” are relevant to a whole new kind of writer/reporter. When we talk about “fraudulent presentations,” what we mean are misleading situations where you, as a blogger, write a favorable article about something, and then it turns out that your recommendation is actually something for which you are being paid by the company whose product or service you’re recommending.

One of the more common ways this can come up is with respect to an affiliate link. Let’s say you decide to do a review on a book, and you like the book and suggest that people buy that book. Let’s further suppose that you put a link in your blog article where people can make the purchase, and the link contains your Amazon Affiliate code, meaning that if someone buys the book from that link, you will be compensated. This is one example. An even more flagrant example of this might be found in the pay-per-post concept, where you’re paid to actually write the article that recommends the product or service. Now, the companies that provide pay-per-post services, like the actual PayPerPost.com and ReviewMe.com, have huge

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disclaimers that they require to be posted to your site, so they basically take care of the necessary disclosures for you.

Based on everything that I know, it does not appear that the FTC is actually spending a lot of time fining bloggers. In fact, there are FTC spokespeople who have discussed these new rules and have basically said that their approach is going to be more “educational” at first; that is, when they find an offending blogger, their inclination is going to be to reach out and tell the blogger what they don’t like and what should be changed, and *then* if that blogger is deemed to still be a problem, perhaps more punitive measures will be employed.

FTC Rules Changes

The two primary issues addressed by the changes in rules are earnings claims, as well as the disclosure of “material connections” between advertisers and endorsers. Let’s look more closely at both.

Earnings claims: If you’re going to quote earnings for people who, say, participate in a training program of yours, you have to disclaim not only the fact that those are unique results (which you’ve always had to do), but now, if you give out earnings figures at all, *you have to also share what the average person earns by using your information.*

That can be a problem. How many small Internet businesses that offer a training course of some kind really have the ability to know, as an average, what every person in the program makes? Now, this particular issue may not be as relevant for some of you, but the point is that if you see yourself at some point offering a training of some kind

through your website, you’ll want to keep this in mind.

Disclosure of “material connections” between advertisers and endorsers: This is the new wrinkle that really has far-reaching potential, and it can run the gamut, in terms of relevance, from everything from the utilization of PayPerPost.com and ReviewMe.com, to celebrities going online and writing favorable reviews for products for which they’re being paid tens of thousands of dollars. Again, nothing about these rules says you can’t get paid for the favorable recommendations—you absolutely can; the key is that you have to *disclose* the fact you’re being paid.

As an example, here is a decent sample disclosure: *“Posts may include endorsements of products or services that include a material connection to the author, and readers should assume that such a connection exists.”* Again, this is just a sample, and you have to be sure that any disclosure you put on your site serves your particular purposes, but this is a good, general example of a disclosure that would fit many bloggers who are paid by third parties.

As I said at the outset, I wouldn’t be too terribly worried about these new rules changes. First, it is not likely that the FTC is going to take a great deal of interest in the lower-profile blogger who in no way appears to be openly flouting these new mandates, and second, it is easy to remain compliant with the rules by making simple disclosures like the one above. However, these new rules *are* in effect, and it is important that you maintain some awareness of them as you seek to expand your Internet marketing revenue sources in a variety of ways.