

# Mobile ad blocking is a reality we can live with

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The mobile ecosystem is evolving rapidly and, in my opinion, for the better, says Ben Phillips, global head of mobile at MediaCom.

If the last week has all been about the latest iPhone launch, then the reality is that Apple's most important announcement for our business came months before.

After WWDC 2015 in June, developer documentation revealed that the new release of the Safari mobile browser would bring content blocking extensions to iOS. This would enable consumers to stop cookies, images, resources, pop-ups, and other content from appearing on their screens.

Since that plan was unearthed, the newswires have been full of articles predicting the “end of days” for mobile advertising as we know it.

The truth is that mobile supply still continues to outweigh demand and that Safari only covers a limited part of the market. Not all iPhone users will opt out and bear in mind that much of the content (and related advertising) we consume comes via apps rather than the browser.

Apple’s motivation is as much about its desire to drive consumers into apps – where it can monetise the traffic via iADs – and away from the browser, where Google is making its money. It is not an altruistic attempt to save consumers from advertising overload, rather part of the wider battle between apps and browsers.

Whatever the business battleground, publishers, tech companies and agencies clearly have to respond and some have already taken those steps. It’s still very much a “wait and see” in terms of a formal strategy from many premium publishers, although Nylon magazine says it will be “redoubling its efforts” with regards to native advertising.

This seems a more favourable response than Google’s approach, which has been to seek to punish ad block users viewing its internet channel YouTube by forcing “unskippable” ads to video pre-roll. I’m not sure that will be enough to make them uninstall the software.

It’s clearly a challenge for premium publications. They rely on mobile advertising in order to provide high quality content for free. Without an alternative such as paid-for content and the wonderful world of paywalls, advertising revenue will always be required.

If ad blockers do cause a significant drop in the number of ad impressions they can deliver, then like Nylon, they will have to focus on sponsorship, video and native ad units that circumvent ad blockers.

### Part of a wider shift

As an agency we know that ad blocking is just part of a wider shift in how consumers react to advertising. The mobile ad space is evolving much faster than other sectors and ad blocking systems will change quickly and become more and more sophisticated.

We are working closely with specialist mobile ad tech suppliers to ensure that impressions are only counted once they are delivered. That respects the consumer's right to block while also ensuring that our clients do not pay for an ad that no one sees.

While we are taking precautions, I remain skeptical about the likely impact of these changes. Findings from the recent **'What's My Worth?' report** from Millennial Media reveal that only 3% of polled consumers across the EMEA and the US pay for apps to remove ads.

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**Mobile advertising needs to respond by thinking outside of the 320×50 box and build better ad engagement that consumers don't want to block**

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Additionally, four in five (79%) said they understood and accepted the value exchange of ads supporting free apps and content. Nearly three quarters (72%) said they expected ads on mobile devices to keep content free.

For me this consumer attitude is the most important aspect of the debate. We have the tech to be able to create and target better than ever before and publishers and agencies alike should rise to this challenge.

We should be taking action as an industry to remove ineffective ad units and bad placements. Consumers are aware that they are not paying for great content but will happily view great, creative and engaging ads that are targeted to them as an individual.

Let's embrace the opportunity to think smarter and create better mobile campaigns. Mobile advertising needs to respond by thinking outside of the 320×50 box and build better ad engagement that consumers don't want to block.

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