

Digital Editorial–Advertising Practices

Canadian magazines need to navigate a way forward that allows us to monetize our online audiences, utilize our creative talents and satisfy our advertisers, without deceiving our readers.

In print, magazines call paid content “advertorial.” Online, the conversation is around “native advertising content” (sometimes just called “native”). At its best, native content is paid for by an advertiser but matches the quality, tone and appearance of your magazine’s online editorial content—it is “native” to your editorial brand and values.

BEYOND BANNER AND BIG-BOX ADS

In print, we have clearly defined editorial and advertising space, and industry guidelines for the labeling and appearance of content within paid ad space. Because the digital environment is multimedia and dynamic, it is quickly outpacing a business model based on digital display-ad impressions, or placing paid content within digital ad space, like the leaderboard or right rail.

WHAT ARE NATIVE ADVERTISING CONTENT AND NATIVE ADS?

Native advertising content is paid media, in the form of online content marketing. It is estimated to become a \$59-billion global business in 2018. Many studies show that reader click-through-rates (CTR), and reader engagement, are greater for digital native advertising than for digital display advertising.

Native advertising content uses text, images and/or multimedia, brought to readers by brands. The content can be supplied by advertisers, or created by your magazine’s own suppliers or in-house teams. It appears on desktop and mobile websites, social media and other digital media.

A native ad is the thumbnail-like summary the reader clicks on to link to native advertising content.

WHAT’S ARE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROMOTED, SPONSORED, PARTNER, PRESENTED AND BRANDED CONTENT?

These are various labels frequently applied to paid content in digital magazine formats. There are no widely accepted industry definitions and uses for these terms—like there is for “advertorial” in print—so these terms are currently used at a magazine or media company’s discretion. Like the use of #ad or #sponsored on social media, they all indicate the same thing: paid content.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Consider industry best practices

There are currently no formal digital-specific policy guidelines for Canadian magazines. However, all paid content online should adhere to the best practices and rules of magazine advertising, as established by the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) Canada, Magazines Canada and other industry groups. In the absence of consensus on guidelines, many Canadian media companies and brands have evolved their own policies.

WE HAVE SOME GREAT ROLE MODELS

In countries where guidelines exist, the emphasis is on ensuring that native advertising, like display advertising, must not deceive the reader into thinking it is anything but paid. In the U.S., the powerful regulatory body, the Federal Trade Commission, has compiled the very thorough, user-friendly “[Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses.](#)”

[<https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/native-advertising-guide-businesses>]

The IAB in the U.K. has a two-part series of guidelines, based on audience research that’s available for review. These are valuable for the ad industry’s perspective on policing itself. [<http://iabuk.net/resources/standards-and-guidelines/content-and-native-disclosure-guidelines-phase-1>]

MAKE SURE PAID CONTENT PASSES THE “SNIFF TEST”

If any content was produced, directed, approved, reviewed, modified or otherwise dictated by an advertiser, sponsor, partner or other organization providing payment or other consideration to your magazine or company, it's paid content. In some definitions, this even includes so-called advertising agencies, or paid content that receives premium placement adjacent, or linked to, related editorial content, of which the advertiser has advance knowledge.

ELIMINATE “DECEPTIVE DOOR KNOCKERS”

Guidelines like the FTC's prohibit business models in which a reader clicks on a native ad that has no disclosure terms, or indicators that it links to paid content—even if it's labeled or indicated on the landing page of the content itself as Paid, Promoted, Sponsored or similar terms. This applies not just to websites but to search engines, social media and other platforms where your magazine's content travels. Since mobile traffic makes up an increasing proportion of online readers, your mobile website should label paid content as clearly as the desktop version, on all referring and linked pages.

WHAT ARE DISCLOSURES?

Disclosures can include disclosure terms (like Promoted and Sponsored, or the advertiser's name), visual disclosures (a sponsor logo, for instance) design elements (a box with a shaded background or a rule, coloured type) or audio or video elements distinguishing it from editorial content online. Sometimes an “info icon” (such as an “i” with a circle around it) appears within a native ad: a click or mouse-over reveals a brief statement on your magazine's paid-content policy. These should be as near as possible, and if possible delivered before, paid content in any medium.

CONSIDER INCLUDING SEVERAL DISCLOSURES

Including several disclosures of different types helps ensure reader transparency on paid content. The concern that readers won't want to click on paid content has been defied by credible research that shows that the more disclosure terms, the better (including Polar Mobile's whitepaper, below). Native ad performance, and native content engagement, seem to go up the more disclosures a media brand includes.

RESOURCES

[FTC's “Native Advertising: A Guide for Businesses”](https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/native-advertising-guide-businesses)

[<https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/native-advertising-guide-businesses>]

[IAB U.K.'s two-part series of guidelines on disclosure of paid content, and the research behind them, starts here](http://iabuk.net/resources/standards-and-guidelines/content-and-native-disclosure-guidelines-phase-1)

[<http://iabuk.net/resources/standards-and-guidelines/content-and-native-disclosure-guidelines-phase-1>]

[Polar Mobile's “State of Native Disclosure” \(download\)](https://polar.me/resources/the-state-of-native-disclosure/)

[<https://polar.me/resources/the-state-of-native-disclosure/>]

INSPIRATION FROM IN-HOUSE PAID CONTENT STUDIOS AT NOTABLE PUBLISHERS:

[23 Stories \(Condé Nast\)](http://www.23stories.com/)

[<http://www.23stories.com/>]

[The Foundry \(Time Inc.\)](https://thefoundry.nyc/)

[<https://thefoundry.nyc/>]

[T Brand Studio \(The New York Times\)](http://www.tbrandstudio.com/)

[<http://www.tbrandstudio.com/>]

[WSJ Custom Studios \(Wall Street Journal\)](http://view.ceros.com/wall-street-journal/wsjscustomstudios/p/1)

[<http://view.ceros.com/wall-street-journal/wsjscustomstudios/p/1>]

[Globe Edge \(The Globe and Mail\)](http://globeedge.ca/)

[<http://globeedge.ca/>]