

*PlaySafe, our proprietary ad verification technology designed to block fake pre-roll, reveals the continued need for more transparency in video advertising and stronger IAB involvement.*

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Recently, we launched PlaySafe ad verification, automatically built into to every buy on our demand side platform for video advertising. The development and launch of this service was the result of extensive internal testing across over 7,000 sites, during which we discovered 5.7% of publishers classifying videos that automatically play in small video players (with the volume on) as “pre-roll” in order to drive sellthrough and price. Often in front of very short content, these units are not the central focus of the page and are often inserted below the fold.

We designed PlaySafe to automatically block this by flagging variables like player size and volume. So far it has blocked 3,315,465 fake pre-roll impressions per day. Since our history is in video analytics, this was natural for us, letting us leverage previous expertise to develop ad verification designed specifically for video advertising relatively quickly.

But obviously not every video advertising dollar is flowing through our system. What about the rest of the market? Hundreds of top brands continue to inadvertently buy these ads from other vendors. “Pre-roll fraud is much more commonplace than people think, and preventing it is often like playing whack-a-mole. It’s disconcerting,” says Paul Kontonis, VP and Group Director for Brand Content at Digtas.

The proliferation of fake pre-roll screams out for the Interactive Advertising Bureau Digital Video Committee to act. Back in 2009, the IAB passed a guideline requiring most companies certified against the “Digital Video Ad Impression Guidelines” to disclose homepage auto-plays. We suggest a simple change: changing this from a “Guideline” to a “Standard” to make it binding on a broader set of the industry.

This proposal does not argue that “fake” or “simulated” pre-roll is inherently bad. Many of these ads are able to reach a massive scale quickly, and might still be bought in some form (i.e. above the fold) by certain advertisers to achieve scale cheaply. But one thing is clear: it is high time media buyers know they are getting exactly what they are buying. Every day that does not happen seems counterproductive when you consider a broader trend: according to Morgan Stanley, when compared with other media (print, radio, TV), the Internet accounts for 28% of time-spent (much of that in video), but only 13% of overall ad spending.

Whether the IAB acts or not, we encourage brand marketers and their agencies to continue to demand more from their ad servers, publishers and networks.