

GOOGLE ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO MOBILE UNITS

This Fast Take explores Google's evolving restrictions on interstitial mobile units and how it might affect marketers.

Google's Focus on Mobile Web

With mobile continuing to monopolize consumers' time, Google has pushed to prioritize improving the user experience on mobile web. Keeping users pleased with their mobile web experience allows Google to remain competitive with attention-sucking apps like Facebook and Snapchat, ultimately retaining users on mobile web so ads can be served at ease. Most recently Google has focused on the displeasure and intrusion users experience with interstitial mobile ads.

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Interstitial's Effect on Search

On November 2nd 2015, Google began establishing their outlook on interstitials' effect on a mobile site's search ranking, they declared,

"Starting today, pages with an app install interstitial that hides a significant amount of content on the transition from the search results page won't be considered mobile-friendly. This does not affect other types of interstitials"

This was Google's first stab at cutting back on the amount of times users would click search results only to experience an annoying, pop-up interstitial pushing them to the Google Play Store for an app download, instead of delivering the content they originally wanted. Recently, Google took their stance to the next level by announcing,

"Pages that show intrusive interstitials provide a poorer experience to users than other pages where content is immediately accessible. To improve the mobile search experience, after January 10, 2017, pages where content is not easily accessible to a user on the transition from the mobile search results may not rank as highly."

Google has positioned their latest announcement as an alignment with their objective to provide a quality search experience, helping users swiftly find the most relevant answers or content available. This algorithm update protects their mobile web experience by putting up barriers between the user experience of mobile search and the obtrusive nature of interstitial ads.

Brands will not be penalized for interstitials needed in response to legal obligations or for reasonable sized and easily dismissible banners. Private content behind mobile sites that require logins will also be safe from down-ranking. To clarify the announcement [Google's release](#) highlighted techniques that would mostly likely affect a mobile site's search ranking, which included:

- Showing a popup that covers the main content, either immediately after the user navigates to a page from the search results, or while they are looking through the page.
- Displaying a standalone interstitial that the user has to dismiss before accessing the main content.
- Using a layout where the above-the-fold portion of the page appears similar to a standalone interstitial, but the original content has been in-lined underneath the fold.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR MARKETERS

We will not see the true effect of this announcement until Google's implementation in 2017. Will advertisers comply with the penalties? Will other digital giants make mandates to change ad formats and further regulate the industry?

In the meantime brands should consider the ways this announcement could affect either their brand's mobile site and/or their mobile media strategy. For advertisers, principal implications to consider revolve around the following:

- Mobile specific shifts, like this announcement, further illustrate the growing need for advertisers to separate and identify media strategies best used for specific digital channels (desktop vs mobile).
- Deciding to use an interstitial is a matter of functionality. Interstitials that are engaging and relevant to the consumer, provide users with a value proposition, and presented at the right time can be effective. When considering best practices The IAB and MMA guidelines suggest giving the user the option to easily dismiss the ad and continue through to the desired content.
- Ad blocking is putting immense pressure on mobile/digital giants to make user experience a priority to all parties.

With this said, it is important to recognize there are hundreds of factors that affect search results – with the two top factors being content and links – therefore making it possible for a mobile site to still attain a reasonable ranking even if it has an interstitial pop-up. Advertisers can easily test their mobile sites against Google's standards for acceptable mobile design (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/>) and for a site's functionality across mobile and desktop devices (<https://testmysite.thinkwithgoogle.com/>). Our goal at MEC is to ensure that mobile experiences do not impede on a user's environment rather have it work to enhance their environment.

RECOMMENDED READS

[Read more from Google's announcement here](#)

[Marketing Land: Google will punish "intrusive interstitials" with a ranking penalty in 2017](#)

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