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A MONTH IN MEDIA

September 2017



GOOGLE TO DITCH “FIRST CLICK” POLICY

Google will abandon its controversial “first click free” policy, once described as “toxic” by established publishers such as Axel Springer and News Corp. Until now, Google required publishers to give people access to three articles per day before hitting a pay-wall-if they were found through Google News, in exchange, publishers got high visibility in search results and a bigger audience. But, as Google and Facebook now claim nearly 100 per cent of digital ad sales growth, news sites have been relying on turning the many daily views from consumers into subscriptions to stay afloat – a near impossible task.

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Implications

Google will now offer a flexible sampling model that allows news organizations to decide how many, (if any), articles it offers for free, as part of a collection of new measures designed to support the growth of digital subscriptions. This new policy could fundamentally change the content ecosystem because content behind paywalls will now be on an equal footing with all other content providers.

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ASA CLAMP DOWN ON INSTAGRAM 'INFLUENCERS'

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), has placed increased scrutiny on Instagram, following criticism that branded promotions have not been labelled as such. This came in the same week that global watchdogs increased a crackdown on social media stars and brands who fail to correctly disclose content as being sponsored. Pieces of paid for content will now have to specify that they are an advert through the use of hashtags such as #ad, #advert or #paidfor.

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Implications

Influencers (particularly through Instagram) have become a vital part of many brands' marketing strategies. The appeal and effectiveness of such campaigns undoubtedly comes from the sense of genuine recommendation from a respected celebrity or public figure. The increased vigilance over influencers will affect the impact brands have over social audiences as the posts become increasingly 'ad like'. This increased transparency should be good news for reputable brands and consumers alike, as the public don't want to feel they are being manipulated by underhand tactics, and clear guidelines provide credibility to branded communications.

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AMAZON FELLED AS EU CRACK DOWN ON BACK TAXES

Brussels has hit Amazon with a bill for Luxembourg back taxes worth several hundred million euros in the latest fallout from the EU crackdown on multinationals' tax avoidance. At the heart of the Amazon case is the Goldcrest project, which restructured its European operations in 2004 and moved its intellectual property (such as software and customer data), into a non-taxable Luxembourg partnership, resulting in royalties of \$3bn not being sent back to the US.

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Implications

The case against Amazon is the fourth of about a dozen tax probes launched by the Commission in a crackdown on tax avoidance by multinationals. Decisions have been taken against Apple in Ireland, Starbucks in the Netherlands, and Amazon and Fiat in Luxembourg. Multinational companies have come under fire since the global financial crisis for shifting profits between subsidiaries, using the tax gaps between countries to minimise taxes.

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TWITTER TWEAKS

Having previously suggested a longer 'mini-blog' format was a potential way forwards, the social media giant has now unveiled a trial of 280 character tweets. A randomly selected percentage of the Twittersphere will find they can use the new 280 character limit in a move that overhauls a defining feature of the platform.

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Implications

Following on from last year's update, that excluded video and photo content from the character limit, this adjustment is Twitter's latest attempt to overcome their downturn in fortune. After its Q2 earnings this year, Twitter revealed that it had not grown its Monthly Active User base. They will be hoping that by changing the character limit more users will either take up the channel for the first time or return to using it following a brief hiatus.

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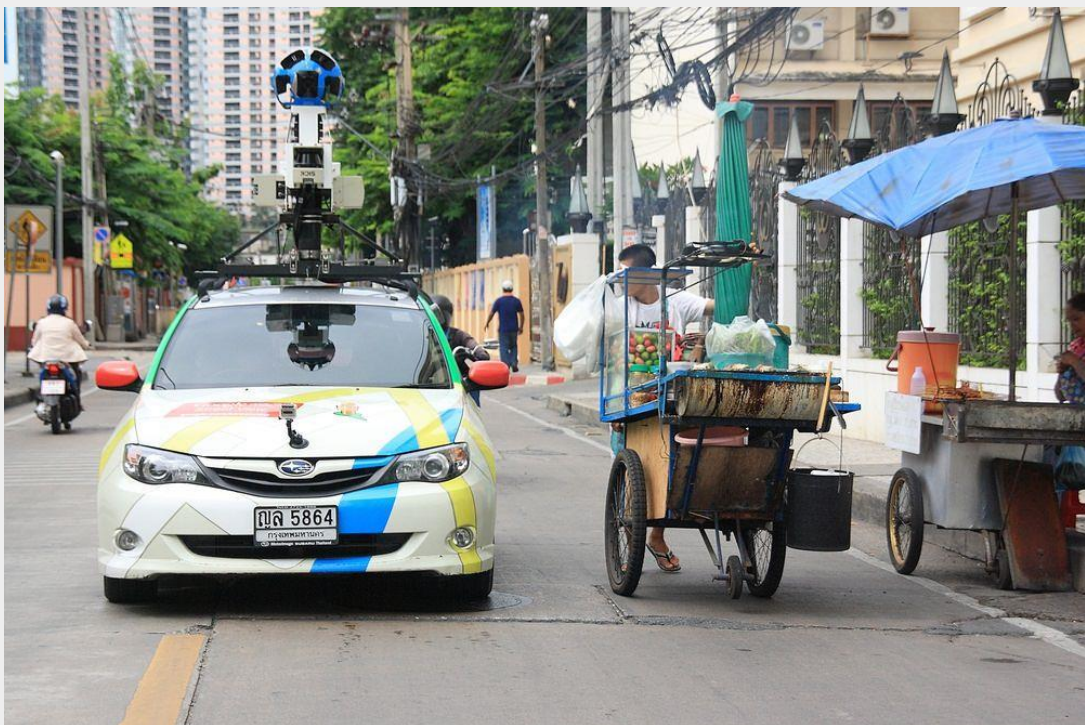
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MAJOR ROADWORKS ON GOOGLE STREET (VIEW)

Since 2007 Google Street View has put more than 10 million miles of roads online for all to see and last month announced the first major upgrade in eight years. The refined Street View hardware will capture HD images from all sides and provide raw data to feed image recognition algorithms.

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Implications

As more and better mapping comes online, so do more revenue generating opportunities. Geo-targeted advertising should become more relevant and accurate, especially in less developed economies where Google and its competitors hope to find their next few million users. In addition, these systems can be used to accurately predict income, race, and voting patterns of neighbourhoods, with software that logs things like the make, model, and year of cars in Street View images.

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AMAZON UNVEILS NEW ECHO DEVICES

Amazon has unveiled a range of new Echo/Alexa's, expanding its line-up to 6 different devices. The range includes a variety of price points and functions; for example, compatibility with over 100 smart home devices that can be set up via voice, without any apps. Despite being launched in 2014, the connected devices space seems to still be in discovery mode. Without doubt, these devices are popular and successful. However their use beyond portable speakers has had mixed results, with some high profile issues and the uptake of connected home devices growing at a steady rate.

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Implications

Amazon will be looking to build on their strong sales during the 2016 Winter and Christmas period. With entry point devices as low as \$50, they will hope to get into enough homes to create critical mass. With these latest devices, they are in pole position to shape the category – though eyes will be on Google's response.