Riley Osborne

Dr. Sean Hayes

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Ethics Paper: How to Deal with Ad Blockers

There are many reasons people block ads. Christians block them for moral reasons, and others block them to avoid online trackers. Because ads are a nuisance, it is important to comprehend all perspectives of the Ad blocking industry: the advertiser, the content provider, the consumer (you), and God’s word on the matter. I support content providers that engage in appropriate ad usage, and consumers ethically using ad blockers within biblical moral guidelines.

Many conditions exists where ad blocking should be considered ethical, however, discernment is up to each consumer. Ad blocking is not a wholesome industry founded on good morals but is instead an advertising mafia that makes money and controls ads (TechStuff, 32:38-32:48). The ad blocking industry is unethical in practice, by receiving money from Google, so that Google can avoid their software restrictions and appear on their ad blocking whitelists (Kelly). Ironically, ad blockers have also been caught advertising for ad blocking in New York Times Square, a famous spot for ads where they cannot be blocked (Tech Stuff, 27:02-27:23). Despite ad blocking’s unethical background, a biblical perspective still supports several ways for consumers to ethically use ad blockers. Colossians 3:5 instructs us to put to death what is earthly in us like impurity, passion, and covetousness (*English Standard Version,* Col. 3.5). Also, Philippians 4:8 encourages us to think on whatever is pure, lovely, and commendable (ESV, Phil. 4.8). Accordingly, if an ad contains evil, immorality, lust, and does not encourage pure biblical thinking, then blocking that ad is ethical. Keep in mind that since these principles can be interpreted differently, sincere individual discretion is needed. Some people are completely against ad blocking. Their opinion is connected to the Golden Rule and a deeper understanding of why content providers use advertisements (Challies).

Advertising is ethical but requires consideration of the consumers. Likewise, the consumers need to understand why “web ads are not evil” (Broida). Viewing advertisements equals money to support the content providers, which in turn helps them provide you the free content that you desire (Challies). Blocking those ads grants you the free access you desire while cheating the sites of their revenue (Broida). Tim Challies argues that all ad blocking is unethical since it breaks the Golden rule by abusing the advertisement revenue system (Challies). The Golden Rule in Luke 6:31 instructs us to treat others the way we want treated (ESV Lk. 6.31). Challies’s opinion is biblical, but I concur that advertisers should follow the Golden Rule as well, while adhering to additional moral principles. For instance, Romans 14:13 tells us not to be a stumbling block for others (ESV Rom. 14.13). Also, M. C. Loui states that in computing, individuals are to be held morally responsible for acting, and/or failing to act on problems with their product (Loui and Keith 3). Collectively applying these principles, content providers should be held morally responsible for distributing ads on their sites like rude pop-up ads, excessive amounts of ads, invasive online trackers, provocative ads, and ads that lead their consumers to sin.

Consumers as well as content providers should follow the Golden Rule at a minimum. Unfortunately, there are no laws on advertising and ad blocking that require compliance. Therefore, at sites where content providers are rude with their ad usage, but the ad content itself is not immoral, consider avoiding these sites as a primary solution (Challies). This is the most ethical solution for ad misusage, since reverting to ad blockage as an alternative solution is a passive form of stealing their revenue (Broida). However, I argue that there are still times when using an ad blocker is biblical and ethical. If a provocative ad causes lustful thoughts of the flesh like passion, ad blockers are ethical. If an alcohol ad leads you to stumble into sin, or an iPhone ad leads you to covetous and envious thoughts, ad blockers are ethical. Never use an ad blocker to conveniently avoid ads, only use them for moral reasons. Before you block any ads, determine whether it follows the biblical principles on purity or poses as a stumbling block to you. Above all we are accountable to God for our actions, so do not participate in blocking or supporting ads that go against your convictions.

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