The End of Flash: Separating Fact from Fiction

Introduction

In case you haven't heard, the Flashpocalypse has come and gone. You're forgiven for not noticing – this wasn't a mass hysteria sort of apocalypse. But despite a lack of drama, the decline of Flash represents a seismic shift in how digital ads are created, displayed, and experienced by consumers.

That said, there is a lot of confusion about what this actually means. How does this impact the way you market your product? Do you have more options now, or fewer? Does this mean a more time-consuming and less efficient workflow?

This guide to Flash and HTML5 will separate fact from fiction and answer some basic questions about what the immediate future holds for the digital advertising landscape.

Fact: Most sites, namely Google, no longer accept Flash ads.

As of June 30, Google stopped accepting new Flash ads. This means that all new ads submitted to its network must be coded in HTML5, full stop. And in January 2017, Google will stop displaying any previously uploaded Flash ads entirely.

New ads must be submitted in HTML5 and existing Flash ads will need to be converted. Google offers tools you can use to create your ads in HTML5, or you can do so yourself with a variety of available tools or even coding them manually. Some Flash ads that were previously uploaded to AdWords can and will be (and perhaps already have been) converted to HTML5 by Google automatically. Converted Flash ads will be labeled as "Flash and HTML5" in AdWords and will continue to run.

First iPhone release (Flash was never supported on iOS)

Safari starts auto-pausing Flash ads

Chrome starts auto-pausing Flash ads

Google will stop displaying all previously uploaded flash ads

2008

2015

2016

2007

2013

2015

2017

First Android devices released (Very few Android devices ever supported Flash)

Firefox starts auto-pausing Flash ads

Google stops accepting Flash ads June 30, 2016

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Fiction: HTML5 is nothing more than Flash, just newer.

OK, so Flash is on the way out and HTML5 is taking over. Simple enough. But what is this HTML5 anyway?

Without getting too technical, HTML5 is simply the latest progression of the fundamental coding language used to build almost everything on the web.

Basically, HTML5 opens up a degree of versatility that Flash was always challenged to deliver. Not to mention, HTML5 works on mobile devices, something Flash never did. This enables digital ad designers to create responsive designs and utilize dynamic text to enhance personalization and geolocation for a better user experience.

Here are some key benefits HTML5 offers:
– Allows audio and video to be coded without plug-ins (like Flash)
– Offers a device-independent experience, which is another way of saying it caters to responsive design
– Enables the use of live text & web fonts

Fact: HTML5 is now the industry standard for display ads.

Google may have only recently pulled the plug, but Flash has been on the decline for years. Flash has famously never been supported by iOS, which debuted with the iPhone in 2007, and support on Android devices was spotty at best since it launched in 2008. Safari, Chrome, and Firefox have been moving away from supporting Flash since roughly 2013.

HTML5 has been ascendant during that time. The tipping point came in 2015 when the Interactive Advertising Bureau published its handbook, HTML5 for Digital Advertising v2.0, a move that signaled HTML5's status as the industry standard. Google's decision to kill Flash ads in favor of HTML5 was merely the final nail in Flash's coffin.

HTML5 also appears to be the platform of the future, too. Browsers are evolving and becoming more advanced in their support for ever-developing HTML5 features, and this trend will continue expanding the possibilities beyond what Flash was ever able to do.

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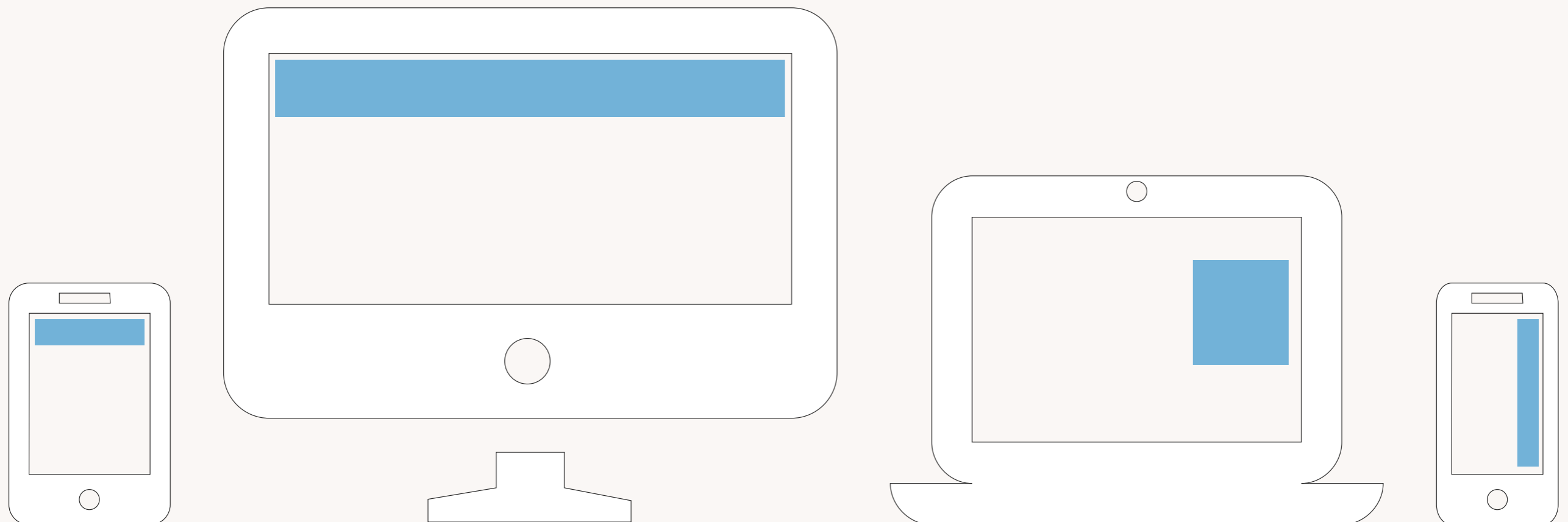
Fiction: Users won't care.

The average user may not be able to identify when and where you're using HTML5, but that's the idea: HTML5 is designed to deliver an enhanced, seamless experience, minus all the hiccups and detours required by Flash and other plug-ins.

This makes the user experience more cohesive, which in turn makes ads less obtrusive. Of course, that makes people happy. Users are notoriously blind to display ads, and many people can't stand the constant interruptions and lags caused by loading ads. So whether or not they understand the intricacies of HTML5, you can bet they'll be glad you're using it.

But while HTML5 makes for a smoother UX, it also enables you to create a more enjoyable one. HTML5 can be responsively designed, so it will work across practically every screen or device, and features like inline video, text you can highlight, and seamless, two-way user interactions contribute to a more useful experience that users appreciate.

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Fact: You can now use web fonts, and you should.

One of the major benefits of HTML5 is that it lets you use live text and, therefore, web fonts. This opens up a host of new capabilities and workflow efficiencies.

Web fonts give designers more latitude when it comes to personalization and dynamic text, allowing the creative to be customized without the fear of broken ads and poor end-user experiences. Live text in HTML5 is searchable, translatable, and automatically wraps and reflows as the layout of a responsive design changes.

System fonts

- ✖ On-brand
- ✔ Crisp
- ✔ Dynamic
- ✖ Consistent
- ✔ Efficient

The fonts that are already installed on your computer. Different for Mac & PC

Images of text

- ✔ On-brand
- ✖ Crisp
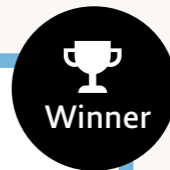- ✖ Dynamic
- ✔ Consistent
- ✖ Efficient

Raster images of type that do not scale without pixelating. (png, jpg)

Web fonts

🏆 Winner

- ✔ On-brand
- ✔ Crisp
- ✔ Dynamic
- ✔ Consistent
- ✔ Efficient

Font files that can be seen without being installed on any viewer's device.

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Fiction: But using images of text is just as good.

Using text-as-image is a viable alternative in some cases but it lacks much of the functionality and flexibility gained when using HTML5 with web fonts. Images (JPEGs, GIFs, etc.) need to be created separately for each individual ad size. Plus, the text is fixed – what you see is what you get, meaning personalization (programmatic creative) and dynamic content optimization is difficult.

Using text that is embedded within an image does allow designers to maintain brand fidelity because you can use any typeface you want. But web fonts enable this too and function natively within the more robust HTML5 environment. This means there is little benefit to sticking with text-as-images.

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Fact: Switching from Flash to HTML5 has challenges.

Change is difficult and switching to HTML5 is not without its hurdles. If your team is oriented around Flash and non-responsive advertising, there will be a learning curve. However, HTML5 is grounded in coding languages that will be familiar to many people, so the learning curve isn't as steep as it would be in an entirely new system.

Ultimately HTML5 leads to a more streamlined workflow that saves time and headaches down the line, so any upfront challenges will be worthwhile in the long term.

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Fiction: You can ignore HTML5.

As mentioned earlier, the digital ad space isn't changing – it has changed. Flash is over. Dead. Buried. And so on. Similarly, users aren't merely shifting from desktop to mobile – that shift has already taken place. Furthermore, the ongoing convergence of screens coupled with the introduction of new use cases will only continue to accelerate as time passes. We're looking at you, virtual and augmented reality...

HTML5 is an integral component of both the present and future. Can you get away without using it for now? Maybe. But doing so means sitting behind the curve and missing out on opportunities to reach your customers in more effective ways. Now is the time to get on board and start adapting to the new and constantly evolving digital ad space.

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