

Google may have misled dozens of advertisers and violated its own guidelines - report

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Google may have misled dozens of business and government advertisers about the viewership of ads running on third party websites and apps, while charging for them, a new report has claimed. Google's TrueView is the company's proprietary video ad product that is displayed not only in YouTube but on third party sites and apps across the internet. Users can skip the ad after five seconds, but an advertiser only gets charged if a user watches 30 seconds – or the length of the ad if under 30 seconds – and if the video is playing audio, and isn't activated by a user passively scrolling past it on the page. Advertising research organisation Adalytics reported this week that its research identified that many advertisers paying for TrueView ads running outside YouTube on other websites and apps might not be getting what they paid for. The firm reviewed the ad campaigns of over 1,000 brands across the internet, and found many of the TrueView ads did not meet Google's own guidelines, including some ads that were run in small video players in the corner or at the side of the screen, some which were fully muted, had no actual video content between ads, or ran with little interaction or activation from the user. Websites running muted TrueView ads include the NYTimes, Reuters, Wired, Mashable and Gizmodo. The research also identified ads in which the skip button was hidden or obscured to make it difficult for users to skip after five seconds. The group said that the mis-identified advertising had been running since 2020. One advertiser told Adalytics that this "is a method for YouTube and Google to extract more budget and manufacture scale in a way that is palatable to the advertiser because they don't fully understand it." The US government, the EU parliament, New York City and a Delaware police department are among the government advertisers on the service. Businesses using TrueView include Ernst & Young, American Express, TikTok, Disney+, IBM, HBO Max and Pizza Hut. One consumer goods brand identified in the report discovered that 20% of its US\$75,000 campaign budget went to YouTube channels, while 80% went to third party apps and sites including investing.com and Candy Crush Saga on Android. Google's director of global video solutions, Marvin Renaud, rejected the report's findings in a blog post on Tuesday, saying it made "extremely inaccurate claims", stating that advertisers are only paying for ads when they are viewed. "We use real-time ad quality signals to determine if people are present and paying attention that help us decide whether to serve a video ad in a Google Video Partner site or app," he said. He said Google monitors adherence to its policies, and last year stopped serving ads on over 143,000 websites found to be in violation. Renaud also said the report inaccurately claims that the majority of campaign ads are run on third party sites rather than YouTube, saying the opposite is true.