

About.com taps DoubleClick Ad Exchange to maximize revenue and operational efficiency



About About.com

- www.about.com
- About.com currently hosts more than 900 popular topic sites supported by independent subject matter expert Guides, who produce original content. In August, 2011, About.com reached 37MM unique visitors in the U.S. (comScore, August 2011).

Goals

- Increase yields from inventory not sold via direct sales
- Maintain site security and reduce latency
- Improve operational efficiency and management

Approach

- Integrated Ad Exchange with existing DFP ad-serving platform
- Employed Dynamic Allocation to maximize revenue opportunities
- Simplified inventory management with single integrated platform

Results

- Increased CPMs
- Protected users against malware, fourth-party calls and other threats
- Simplified ad network management through integrated solution

About.com, part of the About Group and The New York Times Company (NYSE: NYT), is a popular platform for content that helps users solve the large and small needs of everyday life, from technology and health care to education and parenting. In the U.S., 37 million monthly unique visitors (comScore, August 2011) go to About.com's more than 900 popular topic sites supported by independent subject matter expert Guides. About.com Guides are credible, carefully vetted experts who are passionate about their area of expertise.

The site is able to sell out its inventory in some areas but inevitably some inventory, especially outside the U.S., goes unsold. "It's simply not possible to predict our inventory at 100%, so over the years we've worked with a lot of the major ad networks to fill that gap," says Marc Goldberg, senior vice president of business development for About.com. "Recently, though, we recognized that we could simplify our processes and drive better results through the Ad Exchange."

DoubleClick Ad Exchange is an online advertising marketplace and set of controls that help publishers like About.com get the best price for non-guaranteed inventory. The exchange makes ad space available in real time to thousands of advertisers and ad networks that compete for every impression.

For About.com, moving to Ad Exchange made sense for three key reasons: yield, user protection and efficiency.

Dollars and Sense

The primary reason About.com made the move to Ad Exchange was simple: to maximize yield. Google research has shown that Ad Exchange helps publishers increase the cost per thousand (CPM) of their unsold inventory pool by an average of 188%, compared with fixed upfront sales of non-guaranteed display advertising.

"When you get to indirect sales, CPM is what matters most, and Ad Exchange has been great for us because they deliver a combination of high demand from networks and trading desks, as well as from Google AdWords customers, which don't tend to have sales channel conflicts with our existing customers," says Goldberg. "Also, the combination creates a liquid marketplace, which results in the opportunity for higher cpm's."

"The exchange is additive for us. We still have wonderful relationships with large advertisers and the agency community, working to create custom solutions, provide insights and deliver them their goals. Our sell is around intent and contextual nature with a well lit environment. The exchange allows us to experiment with audience buying from networks and other buyers who require a passback or a specific cookie - targeting that we are not getting directly and strategically don't want to chase."

About DoubleClick

Google's DoubleClick™ products provide ad management and ad serving solutions to companies that buy, create or sell online advertising. The world's top marketers, publishers, ad networks and agencies use DoubleClick products as the foundation for their online advertising businesses.

With deep expertise in ad serving, media planning, search management, rich media, video and mobile, our DoubleClick products help customers execute their digital media strategy more effectively.

For more information visit:
www.doubleclick.com

Another key to About.com's increase in yield has been the integration between Ad Exchange and the DoubleClick for Publishers (DFP) ad serving platform that About already had in place. Ad Exchange is embedded within DFP and operations between the two are optimized, so About.com can create and manage campaigns across all of its websites in less time.

The integration also allows Ad Exchange — through DFP's proprietary Dynamic Allocation technology — to automatically sell inventory wherever it generates the highest price. Ad Exchange sells ads only when the exchange can offer a higher rate than About.com can attain through an ad booked directly in DFP.

"The ability of Ad Exchange to integrate with DFP and recognize the best advertiser at the best moment has been critical, optimizing towards the highest price possible for our inventory," says Goldberg.

Quality control

Visitors to About.com expect a certain level of quality and performance. They want the pages to load quickly, and they want to be protected against malware and other security threats. Ad Exchange employs extensive user protection measures to ensure customers and publishers get the quality they expect.

To reduce latency, Ad Exchange prevents activities like daisy chaining and passbacks, and kills any ad call taking longer than 120 milliseconds. Ad Exchange's process keeps the total transaction time down while also ensuring that buyers have the longest possible purchase window for making their decisions.

"Speed matters, and Google understands that," says Goldberg. "Google is a publisher too, and when they build their products, they're thinking about scale and speed."

Ad Exchange also offers extensive protections against malware and the risky practice of ad networks calling other ad networks, known as Fourth Party Calls, with strict penalties to deter problems. Plus, About.com has full control over who can access its site inventory and what ads may be displayed "The malware issue is a major challenge for the industry, but we are pleased that Google continues to invest heavily in protecting our customers," says Goldberg.

Making life easier

Using Ad Exchange has given About.com time back in the day. Google now handles all the billing and invoicing — and guarantees full payment. That eliminates booking inefficiencies and saves staff time that used to be spent on billing reconciliation and manual optimization of ad networks.

"Discrepancies and collections are a common problem for publishers. Using Ad Exchange has freed up a lot of time and resources," says Goldberg. "It's a relief not to have to spend time managing billing, especially with non-U.S. advertisers."

