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POV: GOOGLE CHROME UPDATE: THE FALL OF FLASH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Google recently released a beta version of Chrome that idles any Flash banner ad if the user is not actively engaging with it. This feature will roll out to all Chrome desktop users in a future update, which we are anticipating will be in September or early October. This is a back-end functionality change, and there will be no industry exceptions.

Approximately 30% of all impressions managed by Intouch Solutions' media department are served on Chrome. Given the likelihood of other browsers following Google's lead on this issue, pharma advertisers should begin preparing for this change immediately to ensure their banner ads render correctly, remain in compliance and continue to invite engagement.

This POV explores the changes coming from Chrome, the implications for pharmaceutical advertisers, and the recommendations on what marketers should do next.

WHAT'S CHANGING AND WHY

Google has been working with Adobe to ensure that the user experience on the Web can be **“power-efficient as well as interactive.”** This update significantly reduces power consumption, allowing users to surf the Web longer. However, once implemented, this update will affect all Flash-based banner advertising across all industries. Many pharmaceutical advertising campaigns will be affected, particularly because branded campaigns often utilize Flash in order to display scrolling ISI.

We believe Google is also taking the lead from a browser standpoint to nudge advertisers across industries to adopt HTML5 banner development as standard, something Intouch Solutions has championed for some time.

Currently, Chrome plays all Flash banner ads from beginning to end as long as the user stays on the same view of the page. But when the update is released, Chrome will play only the first few seconds of the Flash ad to find a suitable stopping point and a preview image as a placeholder. Developers will have no control over determining the stopping point or preview image, and during Intouch testing using the beta browser, Chrome's automatic selection was inconsistent. Neither the back-up GIF nor default GIF are being served in place of the Flash ad.



This setting will be turned on by default beginning in September. The user has the option to “play” the Flash ad once it is in its resting place. Below is an example of the resting point for a branded banner as they are displaying in Chrome beta:



IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Intouch has concerns that this change will negatively impact the user experience of the viewer as well as campaign performance. Forcing the user to play the advertisement and removing the visual enticements for a user to engage with will negatively impact click-thru rates and — downstream — affect on-site performance at the brand's .com.

There are two possible solutions to address this issue: running only a GIF banner or completely rebuilding each banner using HTML5.

Intouch Solutions' media team and front-end developers recommend full rebuilds of existing Flash banners in HTML5. Here's why:

- + Branded banners are built in Flash for a reason — scrolling ISI requirements and multiple click-thrus are easily accepted in Flash. A static or animated GIF would not fulfill these requirements and therefore would force the GIF banner to be unbranded.
- + From a media-serving cost perspective, serving HTML5 creative versus Flash comes at a slightly higher costs.
- + From a project cost perspective, most (but not all) creative from an existing Flash banner project could be reusable in the creation of HTML5 banners. While some variables exist, the cost to rebuild banners in HTML5 will increase due to the required time needed for the QA process.



CONCLUSION

After exploring the impact of the change, as well as potential workarounds for existing Flash assets, Intouch Solutions recommends phasing out all Flash creative and converting them to HTML5 from this point forward. All new campaigns should be built in HTML5 from the beginning.

Brands should work with their agencies to evaluate next steps on a case-by-case basis, taking into account both time and cost considerations. Each brand needs to be evaluated on a campaign-by-campaign basis in order to determine the best course of action if converting live Flash banners to HTML5 cannot be completed by the September timeframe.

The Intouch Solutions media department is prepared to work with our internal account teams and media partner agencies to develop the best courses of action.

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