



Online behavioural advertising

From 1st September 2013, the ASAI Code will contain rules about Online Behavioural Advertising (OBA).

OBA involves the use of information collected from web browsers and is used to present online advertisements that are likely to be more relevant to the user of a particular browser on a computer. These rules provide the public with transparency and choice about OBA. Companies involved in OBA must provide notice about the collection and use of web viewing behaviour data for the purposes of OBA, including how a web users can opt out from receiving OBA.

Find out more about OBA

OBA is the practice of collecting information from web browsers so it can be used to present online advertisements that are more relevant to the user of a particular computer. Many advertisers believe OBA offers consumers a much better experience of online advertising.

When you visit a site, a cookie¹ may be placed on your computer's browser by an OBA business (including an 'ad network' or ad technology company). If you or anyone else uses that browser to visit websites the OBA business has a relationship with, the cookie collects information about those visits. For example, it can collect information about pages visited, ads clicked and products purchased or shown an interest in. It does not, however, collect information that personally identifies an individual.

Using this information, the OBA business can allocate the viewing behaviour from a particular web browser to different 'interest segments' and the ad network will then serve different ads to different interest segments. For example, if a browser frequently navigated the book review section of a news website and searched other websites for books, that interest might be placed within a 'book lover' segment and served advertisements for books and other goods or services relevant to a literary interest.

Alternatively, a specific product or service may be displayed on your browser because you have actually looked into buying that particular product. For example, you may be looking for a present for a friend (a coffee maker for instance) and search a department store website and click on a few different coffee makers in the appliances section. After a while you give up your search and decide to visit an online newspaper site to read an article. Once there, you may find that you are then presented with ads for different coffee makers. This type of advertising is sometimes called 're-targeting'.

¹ A cookie is a text-only string of data that is entered into the cookie file or "memory" of the web browser on your computer. It will typically contain the name of the domain from which the cookie has come, the "lifetime" of the cookie, and a value, usually a randomly generated unique number. If you would like to know more about cookies please visit www.aboutcookies.org.

I've opted out but I'm still receiving OBA

Opting out is a reliable method of making sure that information is not collected and used for OBA purposes. However, on occasion other activities can interfere with the 'opt-out'. As part of our process looking into your complaint, we will ask you to confirm that you have followed the below steps.

Remember, however, that opting out of OBA will not stop online advertisements. You will still see online ads when you browse online and you may still see ads carrying an OBA logo, because the logo may still be carried on ads that are not placed using web browsing information.

Steps

Did you opt-out of all? The opt-out options provided by businesses may include a link that allows you to opt-out of receiving OBA from a large number of businesses or from specific businesses only. If your intention was to opt-out of receiving OBA completely, it may be the case that this has only been done for one particular third party. In order to opt-out of a large number of businesses you can visit www.youronlinechoices.com/ie or alternatively change your browser settings (see below).

Have you deleted the cookies on your computer? If you have deleted any cookies on your computer after you have opted out from OBA you may have deleted an opt-out cookie. The normal process of opting out of OBA requires a cookie itself, so if you regularly delete your cookies, but want to remain opted out from OBA, you will need to repeat the opt-out procedure.

Have you opted out on each browser you use? OBA opt-outs work only on the web browser you're using when you opt-out. You will need to repeat the opt-out for each computer and each web browser you use (e.g. Safari, Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer)

You can find more information about OBA and opting-out in the "Your Ad Choices" section of the YourOnlineChoices website. This will also provide you with further background information, tips and advice on OBA, the use of cookies and opting out. You can also visit www.aboutcookies.org to find out more about the way cookies operate on your computer and how you can change your browser settings.

I want to stop all online advertising

Opting out of OBA does not prevent online advertising completely. Online advertising allows businesses and organisations to provide online services at either a reduced or free cost to visitors. Opting out of OBA ensures only that web browsing information is not collected and used to deliver more relevant advertising. You will still see ads on websites as before, but they won't be tailored to your likely interests according to previous web browsing behaviour.

We are unable to take action to prevent advertising from appearing in general, although if you see a specific advertisement that you consider to be misleading or offensive we can take action against those under the other provisions of our Code.

Find out about cookie consent

The ASA Code does not require businesses or organisations to seek your consent for placing cookies on a browser. This means we are unable to look into complaints about cookie consent.

The Office of the Data Protection Commissioner is the responsible Irish body; you can find more information and the DPC's contact details on www.dataprotection.ie

Find out when the OBA rules don't apply

The OBA rules are specifically aimed at providing consumers choice over the collection and use of viewing data to deliver behaviourally targeted advertising. But not all types of online targeting are related to OBA and the rules do not apply to:

- Complaints about OBA for interactive display ads, such as ads embedded in games or expandable ads; and
- Contextual advertising where an ad is served based on the content of the website rather than web viewing behaviour, such as the placement of a sports clothing ad on a sports website because the advertiser believes the readers of that site are more likely to be interested in the ad; and
- For technical reasons, the rules do not currently apply to mobile phones or other handheld devices, such as e-readers and tablets. It is envisaged that the rules will be extended to mobile phones and other handheld devices in time.

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