How advertising on credible news increases reach, efficiency, and performance.

Avoiding misinformation and supporting journalism isn't just about brand safety or corporate responsibility. New data, from an IPG Mediabrands client launch, shows NewsGuard's data for responsible inclusion of news leads to major improvements in campaign performance metrics.

NewsGuard

Key Findings: Avoid Misinformation and Achieve Greater Efficiency

- Until now, digital advertisers concerned about ad placements on unreliable news have been stuck between two bad choices: Either risk ad placements on misinformation sources or block credible news with overly broad keyword-based solutions.

- As COVID-19 misinformation began to spread in 2020, the problem became more acute and urgent for many advertisers.

- NewsGuard partnered with IPG Mediabrands and a top programmatic advertiser to test a new solution to the problem: Using NewsGuard's journalist-curated news source credibility ratings dataset to expand the brand's "Allow List," including previously excluded news sources with high NewsGuard trust scores based on nine journalistic criteria.

- Based on NewsGuard's data, the brand removed numerous unreliable sites from its allow list and added thousands of new, highly trusted local and national news sources.

- The solution led to substantial improvements in key performance indicators for the brand's campaign: Expanded reach, lower CPMs, increased efficiency of ad spend, and higher click-through rates. In the process, IPG Mediabrands and the brand fulfilled their goal of supporting legitimate journalism.

- The highly trustworthy news sources that were added performed better, on average, than the typical site on the allow list. Effective CPMs were 9% lower for the NewsGuard-approved news sites, while CTR were 143% higher.

- The test demonstrates the potential benefit to brands of advertising on trustworthy news sites using NewsGuard's news credibility data—improving campaign performance while removing brand-safety risks associated with misinformation and disinformation sources.

Introduction & Context

In the digital era, both advertisers and publishers face challenges when it comes to advertising on news content. Once among the most preferred advertising options for brands in the print era, news publishers now exist in a chaotic online information environment in which automated systems determine ad placements across millions of web domains.

For advertisers, this has led to substantial brand safety risks. Despite supposed solutions offered by verification technology companies and ad platforms, major brands using programmatic advertising regularly send ad dollars to misinformation and disinformation websites. A recent analysis using NewsGuard's website credibility data and ad placement data from Moat Pro found, for example, that more than 4,000 brands have inadvertently funded COVID-19 misinformation websites during the course of the pandemic.

These included top brands, such as Pepsi, Starbucks, Pfizer, Comcast, Verizon, and 105 hospital systems and health insurers—brands that never intended to fund COVID-19 hoaxes, but until now have not had an effective tool to avoid them.

To further complicate matters, efforts to date to prevent this kind of unsuitable ad placement have proven not only ineffective, but actively counterproductive. According to a Wall Street Journal investigation, top brands use overly broad keyword "blocklists" that prevent ads from being placed on any pages that contain hundreds of common words such as "COVID-19," "Immigration," "Trump," or "Biden." This sledgehammer approach effectively boycotts news content from thousands of credible news organizations at a time when these news sites most need revenues to support their journalism.

Many advertisers' blocklists include terms such as "Black," "Gay," or "Hispanic," meaning that media organizations serving those communities—and filling important gaps in mainstream media coverage—are effectively boycotted in their entirety.

For legitimate news publishers, the effects of this kind of blocking are devastating—with newsrooms struggling to generate the revenue they need to fund quality journalism. For advertisers, the situation leaves many stuck between two bad options: Either advertise on misinformation sources, or block credible sources. Some brands have opted for a conservative approach of advertising on a small subset of news publishers, using a modest agency-curated "Allow List," which has its own downsides including limited reach and ongoing work to maintain the list.

Introducing: Responsible Advertising for News: A service produced by journalists to help brands avoid misinformation and place ads on credible news sources

In this context, NewsGuard partnered with IPG Mediabrands to test a new solution to the problem.

NewsGuard's team of journalists have reviewed and rated thousands of news and information sources in the U.S. and Europe, accounting for 95% of online engagement with news in each market.

The ratings, conducted by trained journalists based on nine basic, apolitical criteria for credibility and transparency practices, are continuously updated and expanded as news sources change practices or new sources begin to trend. Institutions and companies ranging from the World Health Organization to the U.S. State Department to Microsoft and BT use NewsGuard's data to track disinformation campaigns, enhance search or social media feed algorithms, and warn users when they encounter untrustworthy sources.

In the advertising industry, NewsGuard works with brands to apply this data in the form of *exclusion lists*, which keep brands' ads off of misinformation website, and *inclusion lists*, which direct brands' ads toward credible news sites. In both cases, NewsGuard's constantly updated monitoring of these sites by trained journalists produces a far more reliable product than blocking words or AI, which works well to identify pornography or hate speech, but has proven helpless in ferreting out misinformation. NewsGuard's "Responsible Advertising for News Segments" are offered through partnerships with agencies such as IPG Mediabrands and Omnicom, through pre-bid segments in Peer39's offering within top DSPs, and through direct work with brands.

Background: NewsGuard's Methodology

NewsGuard was founded in 2018 with the mission of restoring trust and accountability to news. Its cofounders are award-winning journalist and media entrepreneur Steven Brill—who founded CourtTV, The American Lawyer, and other successful ventures—and Gordon Crovitz, former publisher of The Wall Street Journal.

NewsGuard deploys a team of journalists from diverse journalistic backgrounds to rate the credibility and transparency of news and information websites in the U.S. and Europe. Each website is assessed based on the same [nine simple, apolitical journalistic criteria](#) for credibility and transparency. Based on the nine

criteria, NewsGuard's team of journalists produces trust ratings, 0-100 point trust scores, and detailed "Nutrition Labels" for each site.

Ratings, trust scores, and Nutrition Labels from NewsGuard are integrated into products such as from Microsoft and are available through a browser extension and mobile app aimed at promoting news and media literacy skills. NewsGuard's tools are used by hundreds of public libraries, hospital systems, schools and universities.

Editors at NewsGuard include former top editors at Reuters, the Associated Press, and the Chicago Tribune—and at any given time, NewsGuard's team includes ~50 journalists and freelancers across the U.S. and Europe. NewsGuard has rated all of the news and information websites that account for 95% of online engagement with news in the U.S., U.K., France, Germany and Italy—and partners with government agencies and nonprofits, including the World Health Organization, the U.S. Department of State, and the British Parliament to provide reports on threats from mis- and disinformation.

NewsGuard's Nine Criteria & Rating Process

Each of the sites NewsGuard rates are based on the same nine basic, apolitical criteria of journalistic practice:

NewsGuard Criteria

CREDIBILITY

✓ Does not repeatedly publish false content

✓ Gathers and presents information responsibly

✓ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors

✓ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly

✓ Avoids deceptive headlines

TRANSPARENCY

✓ Website discloses ownership and financing

✓ Clearly labels advertising

✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest

✓ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information

Ratings are produced using a rigorous vetting process that involves reviews by multiple trained analysts and senior editors—and are continuously updated to ensure accuracy after the site has received its initial rating.

NewsGuard Process

NewsGuard's Rating Process

Initial Site Review
A NewsGuard analyst reviews the site's content, ownership, financing, and practices—and creates an initial assessment and Nutrition Label based on the nine criteria.

Contact for Comment
The analyst contacts the site if the initial review finds the site may have failed any of the nine criteria. The site can provide a comment or address problems to improve its score.

First Edit & Fact Check
An second analyst reviews and fact-checks the rating to ensure its fairness and accuracy. The drafter and first editor may exchange multiple drafts, and any disputes are escalated.

Rating Update
Every rating is reviewed periodically to ensure it is still accurate and to update the site's Nutrition Label. If something changes, the site's rating will be updated immediately.

NewsGuard's rating process is designed to ensure fairness and accuracy in every rating we issue.

Second Edit
A senior editor reviews and edits the rating to ensure its fairness and accuracy. The senior editor may send the draft back to the drafter or first editor to address questions or issues.

Ongoing Monitoring
NewsGuard team monitors trending misinformation narratives that might appear on the site, ownership changes, etc.—and uses technology to get alerts if the site hops domains.

Rating Published
Once any issues are addressed, the rating is published and the publisher and any NewsGuard user can see the rating, provide feedback, or flag any factual errors.

Final Review
The final rating is shared with the full NewsGuard editorial staff for a final check, including the Co-CEOs. Any questions or problems can be flagged in an all-staff meeting.

Based on the site's performance on the nine criteria, the site receives an overall trust score of 0–100 points. A site with a score of 60 or above receives a GREEN rating, meaning it is generally reliable. A site with a score below 60 receives a RED rating, meaning it is generally untrustworthy.

NewsGuard Ratings

Green (Trustworthy): The site generally adheres to basic journalistic standards for credibility and transparency.

Red (Untrustworthy): The site does not generally adhere to basic journalistic standards for credibility and transparency.

Underlying each rating are more than 40 metadata points, such as topical areas the site covers, flags for specific types of misinformation or credibility issues, ownership and financing details, and other descriptive metadata.

Case Study: Applying NewsGuard's data to ensure Responsible Advertising on News

Working with the IPG Mediabrands client, NewsGuard applied its data to create an improved allow list for responsible advertising on news.

Allow List Improvement Process:

- NewsGuard ingested and analyzed the client's Allow List.

- NewsGuard recommended sites for removal from the allow list because their credibility practices had changed—for example, a formerly trusted financial news site had begun publishing untrustworthy articles.

- Based on the client's requests, NewsGuard filtered its list for sites with trust scores of 85 or above with no political bias or other potentially risky characteristics, a conservative approach optimized to minimize risk.

- After applying the filters, NewsGuard recommended 1,034 new, highly trusted U.S.-based news sites to be added to the client's allow list of 1,675 news sites, creating a new allow list 60% larger the size of the client's original list.

- The client made the adjustments to its lists and ran a test campaign.

Key Results:

The campaign resulted in higher performance across key metrics:

- Increased reach: The incremental sites added by NewsGuard accounted for 19% of impressions served, generating incremental reach.

- Lower CPMs: The effective CPMs for these sites were 9% lower compared to the overall allow list.

- Improved efficiency: Cost per reach improved; ads on the sites added by NewsGuard were 81% more efficient than the overall allow list.

- Better performance: Viewability was comparable at 84%, and Click-Through Rates were 143% higher among the sites added by NewsGuard.

- Put simply, the client got better results, saved money, and avoided supporting misinformation sites while restoring advertising revenues to quality news sources.

Conclusion: Ending the false choice between brand-safety risk and news blocklisting

The case study results suggest two key findings that could have major implications for the way advertisers think about digital news as an ad inventory category.

- Responsible advertising on news is possible—and easy. First, the results suggest that brands do not need to choose between avoiding news altogether or risking brand-unsafe ad placements on misinformation sites—it is possible to advertise on a wide range of news sources without risking ad placements against misinformation, disinformation, or other inflammatory and irresponsible news content by applying human intelligence to the problem.

- By relying on human-curated credibility assessments constantly conducted by journalists—not algorithms or occasional reviews by agency teams—the client restored advertising to more than one thousand news sites, while maintaining confidence that its ads would not appear on misinformation sites.

- Brands leave money on the table when they avoid credible news. The results show that brands that broadly block news by operating off of narrow allow lists or aggressive keyword blocking systems are leaving money on the table—and potentially a lot of it.

- Put simply: Credible news content attracts engaged, attentive audiences who are looking for information to help them make decisions or better understand the world. For a brand looking to reach potential customers, an engaged news audience offers great potential. High-quality news sites are superior on multiple metrics: reach, CPM, efficiency, and performance. Brands would be unwise to continue to avoid these valuable environments.

The advertising industry is in the midst of sweeping changes, driven by changes to user data regulations, identity tracking technology, and new forms of digital media. No one solution can solve for all of brands' changing needs and challenges. But the results of this case study suggest that advertising responsibly on news content need not remain one of those challenges.

By directing ads to carefully vetted, highly credible, trusted news sources, brands can support quality journalism, avoid misinformation, and generate better campaign results—doing well and doing good.