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Impression Fraud

By Arthur

Impression fraud is a special case of click fraud. The prototypical impression fraudster is the competitor who resorts to unfair means to gain an advantage. His primary motivation is to reduce the ranking of his competitor, and then save himself money by inserting his own ad at a lower rate. Another possible motivation may be a hit-and-run operation (random act of violence). Given the potentially devastating consequences it could have on a person's web site return on marketing investment, it could even be a disgruntled employee.

To illustrate the mechanics and motivation of Let's call this individual Grinch. Assume that Cindy Lou (our protagonist) has an advertisement for Christmas trees running on google ad words. Cindy Lou's Pay Per Click advertisement has been doing rather well, getting a lot of click throughs. She doesn't have to bid a whole bunch to rank high on the sponsored links because the position is a function of bid price and Click Through Ratio. She is getting decent traffic through her PPC campaign. The traffic is very focused, a large number of visitors end up converting. The trees are moving off the lot and things are shaping up rather fine. Grinch too has an advertisement running. Unfortunately (for Grinch), his advertisement is not getting a lot of clicks. In fact, his CTR is so dismal that he has to pay ever increasing sums just to keep it displayed. His ROI is not that great given his higher cost base for the PPC bid. He does not like the fact that Cindy's campaign is doing rather well. Not one bit! So he does something devious.

Grinch toggles off his own PPC ads and then does a lot of searches for keywords appropriate to Christmas trees. He searches on google, and asks his friends to search too. Only he never clicks on Cindy Lou's ad. He runs his campaign for a few days, and Cindy sees her CTR go down and she is at the bottom of the heap. It's now down to a level where Grinch sees a level playing field and steps in toggling his PPC ad back on. Grinch is suddenly back in business, while Cindy has to keep up somehow. Remember, it's almost November and she has to sell off her trees rather soon. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the loss from this activity may well run into thousands of dollars for larger advertisers (maybe when Cindy Lou Trees Inc. goes nationwide). For impression fraud to be effective it has to happen at relatively high volumes (usually accompanied by a "traffic spike"). The result will be lots and lots of impressions and a very low CTR. Also if its done for competitive reason, Grinch may identify himself (if you are really keeping tabs on things) because he has to switch his ads on and off.

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Reporting it to Google immediately will help but will not get you any compensation. Google will still charge you more money for ad placement in a certain position. The impression fraud attack is extremely insidious, because even though the consequences can severely affect the return on investment (ROI), Google's policies don't allow refunds to take place. The take home point is that you have to keep tabs on the traffic, including traffic that is not getting to your site. If you are using a web metrics product, ask your vendor if they have the ability to upload your Ad words data into your web metrics account. You have to reconcile the data from what your historical CTR has been to your current CTR, and your costs. It will help to level the playing field, calculate your effective ROI, and may even allow you to look at alternate plans that are now available from Yahoo, MSN and Ask Jeeves. For More Information, please visit

<http://www.sofizar.com/impression-fraud.php>

Ron Arthur is a Search Engine Marketer working for Carlsbad, CA based web-metrics company Sofizar. He is a member of the team developing a click fraud detection software, ZarTective. While not writing expose's on the darker side of the web, he plays with his cat "Mano" and watches "Rocky

Horror Picture Show" for the 17th time. Or maybe 117th.

Tips For Combating Click Fraud

By Gabriel Adams

Click fraud is one of the biggest issues in the pay per click industry right now. It's easy to understand why, too - click fraud costs advertisers money, but gives no return. It cuts deep into profit margins, and in some cases, may be the difference between making money and losing money.

Click fraud is, at its simplest, clicks on ads that are not generated by a real person interested in making a purchase. Click fraud can come from many different sources:

Click bots, which are robots designed to click on ads, are one source. Click bots are often run by an affiliate of the PPC search engine.

Competitors may click on your ads to try to drive your cost up.

Click schemes are programs people join to click on ads for each other. Usually these people are affiliates of the PPC search engines.

Combating click fraud can be tough. One of the easiest ways to combat click fraud is to not advertise on search engines who deliver lower quality traffic. This factor is easily determined with conversion rates. If one search engine's traffic converts at 2 percent, and traffic from the second search engine converts at 1 percent, you know the traffic from the second search engine is half the quality. Click fraud is likely one of the factors involved.

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In addition to such basic tracking mechanisms, you can use more advanced tracking mechanisms to try to catch click fraud. For example, you could use a script that you would gather data on visitors from PPC search engines (data might include IP address, number of times they clicked on the ad, and time they spent on the site) and use that data to pick out suspicious visitors. You can then submit the data to the search engine and request a refund on the traffic.

Click fraud is probably the biggest problem in the PPC industry, and you can work to save yourself some money by combating click fraud.

Bespoke click fraud detection and protection software from Evolution Internet Ltd:

<http://www.evolution-internet.com/147/prevent-click-fraud.aspx>



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