

Resisting the Advertising Onslaught

Here is the first message I sent to the Sydney Morning Herald in February 2014:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm currently a subscriber to the on-line edition of the Sydney Morning Herald but perhaps not for much longer. The reason is that I've become so very weary of being confronted with full screen digital ads, some of which are pointlessly repeated ad nauseam day after day. They don't encourage me to buy anything. They just spoil the day. It's ultimately a destructive practice that I urge you to reconsider and abandon asap.

As you must already know, full screen digital ads on portable readers differ significantly from those that appear in printed form in that they cannot be avoided or by-passed. Moreover, they are actively forced into the face of would-be readers. Yet who has agreed to this? Not one person that I've ever met. Like the garbage that cinema patrons are forced to sit through before a film they have paid to see, such 'double dipping' is a forced one-way transaction. It occurs because corporate agencies have colluded in arrangements that benefit them financially, not one cent of which reaches the viewer or reader.

This financial and symbolic asymmetry is abusive since few in their right minds would consider discriminating people to be mere passive 'consumers.' What alternative is there to considering them as agents in their own right who deserve consideration and respect? The fact that big business has been driving commercial advertising in a different direction for far too long does not make it right. Any enterprise that chooses to continue down this path for economic gain is actually courting failure. So there comes a point – which I reached during your pre-Xmas ad blitz - when, having been confronted by the same ads dozens of times, I no longer wish to see any of them. They have become utterly counter-productive. I will now avoid considering any product or service promoted in this way. Further, I've no alternative but to regard the entities that engage in these practices as working against our common social and human interests.

I'm happy to pay a subscription for access to on line news. But I'm not going to put up with this tedious and abusive ad blitz for much longer. So my question is this: is there any way that these ads can be removed – or at least avoided – by your readers? Have you, for example, considered offering a premium, ad-free service? If the answer remains 'no' then I'm afraid that, for this particular reader, enough is enough. The only remaining choice is to unsubscribe and go elsewhere.

So in that connection let me point out that the Guardian on line does not subject its readers to such repeated abuse, nor is its website littered with cheap, eye catching ads. Since it clearly respects its readers it is likely to thrive in the coming years and take market share from publishers who do not.

Thank you,

Richard Slaughter

Here is the response I received:

Dear Richard,

Recently you contacted ReaderLink. Your interest in Herald Publications is appreciated.

The following is in response to your correspondence:

Thank you for your email, your comments were brought to the attention of our senior editors.

Please quote 00186121 if you wish to contact ReaderLink again.

Ben & Peter

Contact us:

readerlink@mail.fairfax.com.au

02 9282 1569

9.00 am - 3.00 pm Monday to Friday (except public holidays)

My final message, early March:

Dear Sir or Madam,

I have just cancelled my subscription to the SMH.

The reason is that I am totally sick of having full page digital ads for luxury products - particularly cars - thrown at me every day, often several times over.

While I appreciate that advertising revenue is needed to keep newspapers afloat I'm not prepared to put up with this any longer. It is insulting to your readers.

It may also have escaped your attention that the world is falling every more deeply into an energy / environment crisis. The take-away message is that the luxury products and brands that you are advertising are exactly those we should be relinquishing - not at some point in the future but right now.

If you ever launch an ad-free digital edition please let me know.

Kind regards,

Richard Slaughter.