Google Ads to Ban Spying Products & Software via @SusanEDub

Starting August 11 of this year, Google Ads will be denying advertising for anything designed at “spyware and surveillance technology.” It’s technically an update to the Enabling Dishonest Behavior policy, and will apply to both search and shopping.

What is the Enabling Dishonest Behavior Policy?

Historically, the policy has focused on on dishonesty in many forms, but they mostly fall into things that mislead others, or those that let users get unauthorized access to physical objects.

Services they specifically cite include:

- fake passports
- fake degrees or diplomas
- selling numbers that mimic being for national identification
- things to help pass druge tets
- exam or paper-writing services
- invalid clicks
- invalid reviews
- fake social media endorsement

Unauthorized access examples they give include:

- hacking
- cable-stealing
- radar jamming technology

- traffic signal changers
- phone/wire-tapping

The new rule most closely relates to the anti wire-tapping area.

Specific Product Types on Notice

While Google notes the list provided isn’t exhaustive, they give examples and caveats to exactly what this will apply to.

Google specifies that spyware and tech used for “intimate partner surveillance” will be prohibited. Examples include software that monitor texts, phone calls and internet browsing.

It also includes hardware, such as GPS trackers meant to spy without consent, or cameras/recorders marketed with the purpose of spying without consent.

Exceptions to this rule allow for private investigation service ads, and products made for parents to track underage children.

Steps Taken for Violations

Violations will not result in immediate account suspension. Instead, Google will issue a warning at least 7 days out prior to suspension, so the advertiser has time to comply.

Gray Areas to Watch

What will be interesting to watch is how Google enforces this. Will it be as simple as advertisers removing verbiage from the Shopping feed that notes something may be without consent?

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Will brands use supplemental feeds to note it’s a parent surveillance item to be in compliance? Will it be a blanket effect when the URL calls out “spy” in the domain name?

Does This Mean Anything on Larger Scale?

No doubt, advertisers will be testing alternatives to continue to sell their products in this new environment.

This is also something retailers that carry many different product types should take note of. Places like Amazon will see their listings vaporize, but they have a little under a month to figure out a game plan.

No doubt, the ongoing fight for transparency and privacy is now making its way into marketplaces. With a huge channel like Shopping possibly being off the table for product discovery, retailers and brands will need to adapt.

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There’s also the possibility this could set the tone and pressure on retailers themselves to take a hard look at these product lines, and make decisions internally about what they do and do not carry in their product lines.

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