# TAG’s New Brand Safety Certification Program Requires Third-Party Audits

The Trustworthy Accountability Group has a new brand safety certification program that outlines a set of industry standards to prevent ad misplacement and ad fraud.

At the time of today’s launch, TAG boasts 112 companies that are already certified under the program, including industry giants such as Amazon Advertising, Google, Facebook, GroupM and Walmart. Thirty-one members, including Amazon, Facebook and Google, are certified globally.

The program is based largely upon the UK’s Joint Industry Committee for Web Standards, which merged with TAG in late July to build consistency internationally on brand safety standards. JICWEBS was responsible for initiating a nationwide standard in the United Kingdom that companies have their brand safety measures audited by a third party—something that’s required in the new TAG program.

“It’s really just one more big step down the path of protecting brands in the digital space,” said TAG CEO Mike Zaneis. “And there’s a lot of value in bringing the industry together more broadly and advancing our work.”

Certification involves a number of steps on the part of companies, which can choose to be certified in a single market or globally. Among other requirements, certified brands must have a designated TAG compliance officer who attends an annual brand safety training and facilitates internal reviews. It costs $10,000 per year to maintain the certification, and

while there’s flexibility for brands in how they wish to implement brand safety measures, the measurement system has to be audited by a third-party entity.

Brand safety has been a big story in the past several months as brands have sought to protect themselves from associations with the nonstop bad news that 2020 has been dishing out. Early this year when the pandemic hit, brands rushed to block keywords related to Covid-19—essentially defunding the news websites that need ad revenue to bring people the information they need to stay safe.

Those missteps have led to an important conversation about what brand safety really means.

“Brand safety has become this umbrella term for so many things,” said Zaneis. “If you talk to marketers, they often think of measurement and viewability as a brand safety issue.” But for publishers, they’re more likely to associate user experience or privacy concerns with the term, he added.

For other players in the ad world, brand safety is even broader than that. According to Nandini Jammi, co-founder of the industry watchdog Sleeping Giants and brand safety consultancy Check My Ads, brand safety is about making sure you’re telling the right story with your ad dollars.

“Right now, brands are struggling to manage a wide range of societal issues like systemic racism and disinformation ahead of an election,” said Jammi. “They’re struggling internally with how to draw the line on what they support through their media buy and how to communicate their stance with the public.”

From that perspective, Jammi believes the industry needs “a brand safety certification that goes beyond ad placements, and takes into consideration how your brand shows up in the world, both in the media and through their actions.”

But with wide-ranging buy-in from industry players, Zaneis sees TAG’s new program as simply the next step toward a more transparent digital advertising industry.

“We’re very specific with this program that what we are talking about is ad misplacement,” Zaneis said. The program aims to build transparency around brand safety practices in order to stop ad misplacement and empower buyers to be more “flexible and determinative” in where their ads appear.

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