

Busting ad spoofing with ads.txt

By [Bongani Mithavani](#), issued by [Incubeta](#)

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Counterfeiters are found in every industry; in music, film, and even the products we use on a daily basis. The industry makes millions of dollars in revenue which is accessed in unscrupulous ways. As the rise of fake news is plaguing the digital advertising landscape, so is the rise of counterfeit impressions.

The online industry has grown tremendously in the past few years, and counterfeiters have discovered the potential the industry has for them to earn a quick buck. It is with this in mind that the IAB Tech Lab, together with industry players, has introduced ads.txt. A tool which is set to increase transparency in the fast-paced programmatic advertising ecosystem.

Ads.txt stands for Authorised Digital Sellers and is a simple, flexible and secure method that publishers and distributors can use to publicly declare the companies they authorise to sell their digital inventory.

The way this would work out is that the functionality would filter out impressions pretending to be from a premium publisher, as well as any unauthorised reselling of a publisher's inventory.

By creating a public record of Authorised Digital Sellers, ads.txt will create greater transparency in the inventory supply chain, and give publishers control over their inventory in the market, making it harder for bad actors to profit from selling counterfeit inventory across the ecosystem.

To put it simply, the platform will provide a simple way for demand-side platforms (DSPs) to check if inventory from a particular source has been authorised for sale by the domain owner.

Google is a major player in the digital advertising landscape has come out in full support of this tool in line with their product offering being DFP, Adexchange, and DBM.

How to create an ads.txt file: SSPs

Your ads.txt file should publicly declare the account for each exchange or supply-side platform (SSP) that is authorised to sell your inventory. Create this file as a text (.txt) file and host it at the root level of your domain (for example, <https://example.com/ads.txt>).

Include a separate line in the file for each authorised seller. Each line in a publisher's ads.txt list requires three pieces of data (plus a fourth optional field):

<Field #1>, <Field #2>, <Field #3>, <Field #4>

The sample file at <https://example.com/ads.txt> could include the following rows:

yellowadexchange.com, 54251, DIRECT, AEC242

brownadexchange.com, 3325, DIRECT

goldssp.com, 4451, RESELLER

Google has a help centre article detailing the requirements for the fields as listed above.

This article describes how to create an ads.txt file for Google publishers. For other SSPs/exchanges, visit their respective documentation on creating an ads.txt file or contact them.

How DSP encode information from an ads.txt file

In order for DSPs to ingest data from an ads.txt file, they will need to have a crawler that is capable of checking ads.txt files of the domains found in bid requests. The list will identify the Exchange or SSP that the domain is authorised to be sold on, and the Publisher ID on each exchange that is explicitly authorised to sell the domain. Additionally, ads.txt enables the buyer to determine if the Publisher ID that they are buying the domain from is owned and operated by the publisher, or if it is an authorised seller.

Where to from here?

Once implemented the key will be for agencies to get the publishers they represent to sign on to ensure that the success of the program is measurable. The program has been in its public comment stage leading to June 19 where its integrations into exchanges were being ironed out. One should mention though that it's too early to tell how popular the tool will become within the ad industry. However, gauging from the responses so far it is set to bring relief to buyers and publishers alike.

Sources:

<https://docs.openx.com/Content/demandpartners/quality-ads-txt-demand.html>

https://support.google.com/dfp_premium/answer/7441288?hl=en

<https://iabtechlab.com/how-to-ads-txt/>



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Bongani is a campaign manager at DQ&A.

With his ear constantly listening to the heartbeat of the digital media industry Bongani has worked for various media and advertising houses and has around four years in the marketing and digital media environments. Always on the lookout for new products offerings and insights from various platforms like Google, Facebook, Appnexus, Tubemogul as well as others in the digital media space helps him when recommending solutions for clients.

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