Word count: 647

**CEO Column: Blocking Won’t Solve the Digital Ad Puzzle**

*By David Chavern, president & CEO, NAA*

It is no secret that we don't like ad blockers.  Last week, eMarketer estimated that nearly 87 million internet users will be blocking ads in the United States in 2017 – that’s 33 percent of internet users.  In particular, deceiving the consumer into buying into a whitelisted, “quality” ad experience, as Adblock Plus does, is not acceptable. Nor is Brave Software’s business model of selling its own, “better” advertising to appear on publishers’ pages instead of our own. And allowing consumers to bypass our advertisers and access quality news content for free has dangerous implications for our democracy.

This is why, at NAA, we have taken a very aggressive stance against ad blocking technology. A few weeks ago, we filed a [complaint](http://www.naa.org/News-and-Media/Press-Center/Archives/2016/FTC-Complaint-Ad-Blockers.aspx) and request for investigation with the FTC, asking that they look into the many deceptive business practices of leading ad blockers. In April, we filed a cease-and-desist letter against Brave Software. The letter was signed by 17 of our member companies – representing more than 1,700 newspapers – and put the company on notice that its plan to substitute our advertising with its own is blatantly illegal.

But the rise of ad blocking is also a symptom of a problem that everyone in the digital media business needs to address:  namely, lots of digital advertising stinks. It is too often disruptive, ineffective and not at all creative.  It is almost always derivative of print or TV advertising perspectives without any acknowledgement of how the digital experience might be unique.  We don't run print ads on TV, or TV ads on the radio, but we insist on running banner ads and 15-second TV commercials in the digital environment?  Where are the 7-second – or 2-minute – video brand spots; or the interactive graphic spots?

Lubomira Rochet, L’Oréal’s chief digital officer, told [the Financial Times last week](https://next.ft.com/content/5ca43fb8-345e-11e6-ad39-3fee5ffe5b5b) that ad blocking “is pointing to a classical advertising fatigue.”

We can do better. And I believe that news media companies have the unique skills and perspectives needed to create strong and effective advertising. We understand what constitutes a story – and what doesn’t. We know how to create content that captivates, engages and tells the consumer what they really need to know.

The good news is that news media are already doing this. Last week, Deseret Digital Media, owner of *The* *Deseret News*, formally [launched a native advertising studio](http://www.cjr.org/business_of_news/native_advertising_local_media.php) to help local media produce high-quality branded content. The studio professionals train the staff of other news outlets and work with them to produce specific campaigns for local advertisers. The studio, BrandForge, has the resources to experiment and push the creative bounds of digital advertising, and the result is that everyone benefits. Local news outlets offer high-quality, immersive branded content that fits the needs of both the advertiser and the consumer.

Or consider “[Backwater](http://adage.com/article/special-report-cannes-lions/york-times-ge-mini-vr-work-wins-mobile-grand-prix/304639/),” one of two original VR dramas that *The New York Times’* T Brand Studio created for Mini. A product demo in virtual reality may have been interesting and unusual enough, but the studio opted to tell a dynamic, immersive story of a diamond heist where the Mini Connected system played a key role. It comes as no surprise that *The Times* has just earned a Grand Prix at the 2016 Cannes Lions festival for these sponsored VR spots. Its work was even called “a Wright Brothers moment for mobile” by Malcolm Poynton, the mobile jury president and Global Chief Creative Officer at Cheíl Worldwide.

This is the type of advertising that consumers will remember. The Backwater story is something viewers have sought out, not avoided. And the same can be said for the engaging, informative advertising produced by members such as *The* *Deseret News*.

The industry is realizing that to succeed, advertising must resonate with the consumer and their needs. News media have the opportunity to lead this evolution, because we already understand how to engage audiences and provide the valuable information.