

ALLIANCE AGAINST BAIT & CLICK

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Industry Leaders Unite to Protect Internet Users from Deceptive On-line Ads

Alliance Against Bait & Click Website - www.stopscads.org – Focuses on Safeguarding Search

Ever wonder why you end up at one product's website when it's not what you wanted or even thought you clicked on? You may have just been suckered by a "scad," a scam ad lurking in sponsored search results that leads consumers to sites unaffiliated with the brand entered in their search.

The risks of scads to consumers involve more than wasted time or frustration because scads often take unsuspecting internet users to unsecured sites – exposing them to fraud, viruses and spyware.

A recent study showed that over 75% of online consumers are confused by these scads, but help is on the way. The Alliance Against Bait & Click (AABC), a coalition launched today, is focused on arming internet users with the information they need to avoid scads and safeguard their search.

Leaders from across industry sectors have joined together to form AABC and launch the website – www.stopscads.org. AABC's goal is to raise awareness of "bait & click", the practice which lures consumers to potentially dangerous sites by using unauthorized and unaffiliated brand names in scads. The site also provides internet users with tools to avoid the pitfalls of deceptive search practices.

"Search engine listings remain plagued by scams and tricks. Consumers deserve to find what they are searching for, but search engines often feature whichever advertiser is willing to pay the most," said Professor Benjamin Edelman, a member of AABC. "Search engines should protect users from deceptive ads, but if they won't, we will."

Despite rules that protect consumers from similar practices in offline marketing, this deception continues to be profitable to the search engines and deceptive marketers, while undermining consumer confidence in brands. Search advertising continues to be the largest online revenue format, generating over \$6 billion in 2006, according to the Interactive Advertising Bureau.¹

Members of AABC include 1-800 Contacts, IHG (Intercontinental Hotels Group), Marriott Hotels and Resorts, Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Northwest Airlines, Rosetta Stone and Cyveillance. Prominent experts on information technology and business strategy, including Professor Eric

¹ IAB Internet Advertising Revenue Report. 2006 Full-Year Report.

Clemons of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and Professor Benjamin Edelman of the Harvard Business School, have also lent their support to the effort.

Unknown to many internet users, advertisers can buy the use of another company's trademarked brand name from search engines to trigger their own ads. When the brand name is entered as a keyword in a search, the scad appears - hijacking the consumer to the competitor's site.

Many times, the scad will attempt to mislead the consumer by including the brand name in its title or text, despite having no affiliation with the brand. Research commissioned by some members of AABC focused on travel-related searches found that three quarters of respondents were confused when viewing a sponsored result that contained the name of the specific brand they searched for.

Once a consumer has been tricked into clicking on a scad, it not only wastes time, but it can also pose direct risks and harms. Compared to ordinary organic listings for the same search terms, sponsored search results lead to twice as many sites possessing spyware, sending spam, or distributing false marketing claims.² Scads may also charge consumers for dubious or unwanted services. For example, several scads direct users to sites that charge for *Firefox*, a popular free web browser. Other scads lure consumers to websites using outrageous and false claims – for example, promising “free ringtones” even though in fact a paid subscription is required.

In addition to providing tips and tools to internet users on how to spot and avoid scads, the AABC website also provides avenues for action. The AABC site features a petition to the FTC calling for tighter controls. The AABC site also lets interested consumers contact the search engines directly to report scads and request tighter filters.

“We encourage consumers to look before they click and avoid ads that look suspicious. The less people click on bogus ads, the less money the search engines and fraudulent advertisers will make and the quicker the scads will go away,” said Jarrod Agen, spokesman for AABC. “Most importantly, if it's not what you're looking for when you land, you should leave.”

For more information on the Alliance Against Bait & Click or how to spot “scads”, please visit www.stopscads.org.

ABOUT THE ALLIANCE AGAINST BAIT & CLICK

The Alliance Against Bait & Click protects consumers from deceptive search engine marketing practices. We believe that buying & selling search terms for brands you don't have the right to use is wrong. Internet users should be able to click on an ad without worrying about being misled or getting ripped off. The impact of scads – or scam ads – spreads beyond their effect on legitimate advertisers. When a user can't trust the results of sponsored links, it erodes consumer confidence in search. Join the Alliance Against Bait & Click. Stop scads.

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² “Sponsored results contain 2.4 times as many risky sites as organic sites.” The State of Search Engine Safety. McAfee Inc. June 4, 2007.