"SKIP THIS AD." THOSE THREE words are a preamble to almost every invasive ad on the Web, from interstitials to takeovers. For many Web consumers, these three words represent a much-welcomed escape valve. Clicking on it gives users an opportunity to kill an attempted ad delivery before it starts and get right to the desired content. For them, it means just saying no to Web ads that they'd just as soon not see. Creating these buttons has never been that popular with the revenue side of Web publishing since, typically, advertisers only pay sites for ads that actually run, and not for those that are skipped. But publishers nevertheless allow skipping because they fear how users might react if they didn't. In the Web-publishing world, competition is just a click away. Users almost always have someplace else to go to get similar, if not exactly the same, content or experience. As much as publishers want to maximize every advertising opportunity, most don't, believing that upsetting visitors will result in lost loyalty and fewer page views.

Will it always be so? Will publishers always feel the need to provide these ad escape buttons when they use particularly invasive ad formats? Have consumers already become too accustomed to them? I think not. I think that there is a good chance that "Skip the Ad" buttons will disappear some day; and, most significantly, consumers won't even care.

How is that possible? Simple. The advertising will get so much better and so much more useful that consumers won't want to skip it. This is the challenge that we as an industry should embrace. We should strive to produce and deliver ads that people want, not just ads that they are willing to tolerate. This is what it will take for online to win in a future that is all about the consumer, not about the media, the advertisers or their products.

How will we do it? We'll do it with more relevant ads. We'll do it by providing more value in our ads for consumers, with more and better information or entertainment. And we'll do it by giving consumers more control over the ad experience, such as better interfaces for interactivity or the improved capabilities to select lengths or formats. Some details:

More relevance. Giving people ads that they want starts with targeting ads to people, not just pages. The same ad for everyone is not going to cut it anymore. Consumers are only going to accept ads if they mean something to them, and rarely does that mean that one size fits all. This will require much more work in consumer segmentation and in dynamically tailoring ads and offers accordingly. This will require much better targeting than almost any publisher uses today.

Ads will have to have better content. If advertisers and publishers want consumers to engage with their advertising, they will have to give them more value. That may mean ad design and architecture that delivers faster, more specific information about products or services that interest users, or entertains them in a way that makes paying with their scarce attention worth the time.
and formats will have to get better. This is going to put a lot of pressure on both the creative and media sides of agencies, but also on the page design and data interfaces of publishers.

**More control.** Consumers are in charge now. For them, it's all about "me" these days. That won't change--ever. Succeeding in this environment will mean understanding what they want to "pull" and giving them robust capabilities to do so. Pushing ads without a corresponding capability to control what is consumed will not work. Not only will this mean information exchanges with consumers that most advertisers and publishers are not used to, but it will also require advertising formats and consumer "dialogue" capabilities that do not exist today--at least not in a highly scaled way. Blogs and user-generated media are beginning to show us what this future will look like, but we're still far away from true dialogue among consumers, advertisers and publishers.

If we are successful--and we will be--this will certainly be the future of advertising in all digital media, not just on the Web. Television has its remote control and TiVo problems, and ad skipping on TV will only go away with the same solution. In the future, people will be able to skip ALL advertising. If advertisers want to actually engage users, it will only be possible though ads that provide so much value that consumers will really want them.

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