Ads *ad nauseam*: How to combat ad blocking

By [Bandile Ndzishe](#)   17 May 2016

It is unquestionable that ad blocking has gone mainstream, even though it is not a new phenomenon.

Attempts to block advertisers were hitting the market fast and furious as early as the 1960s. The battle against adverts goes back many decades ago. Remember an American inventor Robert Adler who made life of leisure more comfortable and lazier for couch potatoes by experimenting with a process that would enable remote control of a television using radio waves?

Infographic source © [Silver Light Digital](#)

The device was perfected in the 1960's, as Adler's remote control was modified to allow ultrasonic signals to communicate complex commands to TV sets, enabling the operator of the remote to block ads by changing the channel during a commercial break – without leaving the comfort of their reclining chair.

In the 1970s, mechanical preset buttons allowed vehicle drivers to not only change the car radio station while safely watching the road, but it also gave listeners a quick solution to skipping ads.

Today, we have ad blocking, PVR technology, commercially-free satellite radio, presets technology for blocking radio ads, DVR commercial skipping feature, and many more technologies that enable the ease at which we skip ads and make ads almost redundant.

In many countries, millions of consumers are empowered to block telemarketing calls by simply registering their phone number on the "Do Not Call" websites.

Following on the footsteps of Mozilla, creators of the Firefox Web browser who introduced a *Do Not Track* feature that blocked advertisers from profiling a user's identity and browser history. Today's browsers all offer standard features enabling users to surf the web in secret, or employ ad blockers that completely free mobile and desktop browsers from banner ads – literally eliminating them from view by preventing the browser from loading the ad.

Infographic © .

click to enlarge

What is ad blocking?

Technologies that consumers are using to prevent the download or display of advertising. Ad blockers exist for most desktop web browsers and are now beginning to impact mobile web browsing as well.

Content publishers need to stop thinking that serving advertisements, that NOBODY WANTS, to internet users is the only way to monetise content.

Browser extensions are the most common forms of ad blocking. Browser extensions can:

- Block the request for an ad (no HTTP request)
- Collapse the element where the ad would display.

How big is ad blocking usage? What are the quick facts? Is ad blocking growing globally? What about in South Africa?
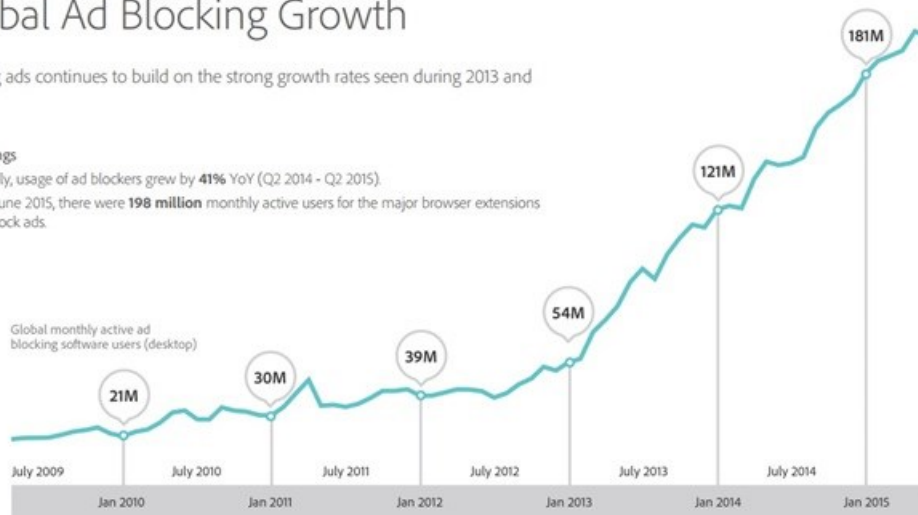

According to 2015 global report on ad blocking by PageFair, a company specialising in helping websites survive the rise of ad blocking, the latest data really puts into perspective just how fast the ad blocking market is growing, with the global use of ad blockers being up 41% (to 198m) between Q2 2014 and Q2 2015.

Global Ad Blocking Growth

Blocking ads continues to build on the strong growth rates seen during 2013 and 2014.

The findings

- Globally, usage of ad blockers grew by **41%** YoY (Q2 2014 - Q2 2015).
- As of June 2015, there were **198 million** monthly active users for the major browser extensions that block ads.

Global monthly active ad blocking software users (desktop)

181M
121M
54M
39M
30M
21M

July 2009 — Jan 2010 — July 2010 — Jan 2011 — July 2011 — Jan 2012 — July 2012 — Jan 2013 — July 2013 — Jan 2014 — July 2014 — Jan 2015

click to enlarge

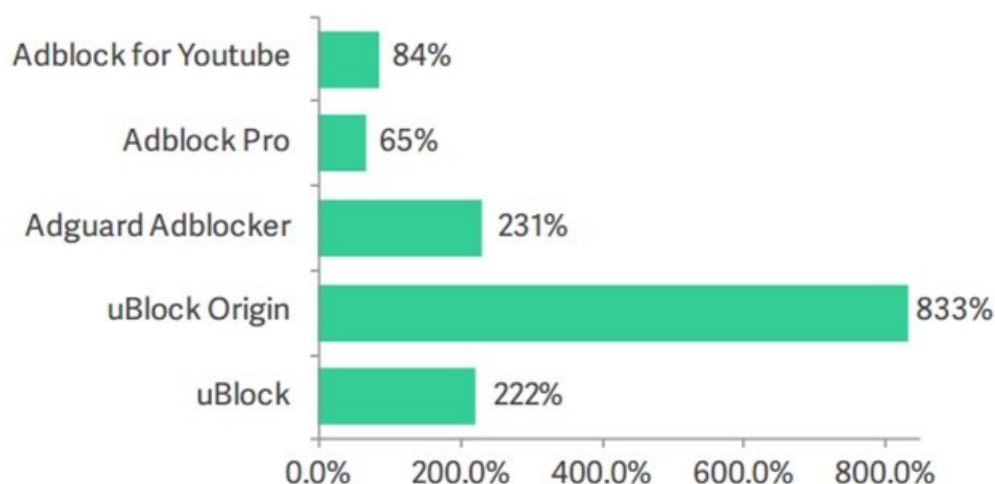**These are the quick facts about ad blocking based on the 2015 Ad Blocking Report By PageFair:**

- Ad blocking estimated to cost publishers nearly **$22 billion** during 2015.
- There are now **198 million** active ad block users around the world.
- Ad blocking **grew by 41%** globally in the last 12 months.
- Ad block usage in Europe **grew by 35%** during the past year, increasing to 77 million monthly active users during Q2 2015.
- **US** ad blocking **grew by 48%** to reach 45 million active users in 12 months up to June 2015.
- **UK** ad blocking **grew by 82%** to reach 12 million active users in 12 months up to June 2015.
- **South Africa** ad blocking penetration **stood at 1%** in 2014 and in April 2015 the usage of ad blocking software **stood at 2%**.

Major players in the ad blocking industry

Adblock Plus leads the charge, but is not the only name in ad blocking. It dominates the market with 51% of global share, but this program shouldn't be confused with the separate AdBlock, which itself covers 38% of the market. UBlock Origin leads the pack of emerging ad blockers at a rate of 833%.

Growth of Emerging Ad Blockers
10 month period, November 2014 – August 2015

Adblock for Youtube	84%
Adblock Pro	65%
Adguard Adblocker	231%
uBlock Origin	833%
uBlock	222%

0.0% 200.0% 400.0% 600.0% 800.0%

1. Why are consumers so jaded, disinterested and disillusioned with ads to the point of blocking them?

2. Is it because they have had too much of the same irrelevant information bombardment recycled and repackaged as new?

Nobody wants to be tracked and advertised to constantly, period.

History shows us that ad blocking innovation and consumers' demand for it is nothing new. Panic over recent methods of digital ad blocking must be put in proper historical context. The consumers' long-held desire to skip ads must be acknowledged.

Ad blocking in the US

In the US, PageFair found that consumers are more likely to block ads with concerns that they are using their personal data or that they are simply becoming too frequent. Misuse of personal information was the primary reason to enable ad blocking. An increase in the number of ads was more important among millennials. US ad blocking **grew by 48%** to reach 45 million active users in 12 months up to June 2015.

Ad blocking in the UK

The leading reason cited by UK consumers is that ads are 'interruptive' – 73% of people using ad blockers use them for this reason. Further reasons include that ads 'can be annoying' and that they 'slow down web browsing'. UK ad blocking **grew by 82%** to reach 12 million active users in 12 months up to June 2015.

Ad blocking in South Africa

According to [The 2015 ad blocking report by PageFair](#), South Africa's ad blocking usage and penetration stands at only **2%**. The ad blocking software usage stood at **1%** in 2014.

I ask myself, "Why is the usage of ad blockers in South Africa so very low compared to the US, UK and other European countries?" Could the answer be that many South African internet users find ads to be relevant and useful? Is it perhaps because they are not well aware of ad blocking? If most South African consumers don't find digital advertising irritating but rather that it helps them find things that are relevant to their daily lives and experiences, they would surely be angered when they learn that their rapidly depleting data is consumed by intrusive advertising.

My bet is that most South Africans are unaware that ad-blocking tools even exist, otherwise they will never allow intrusive advertising to gobble up their mobile data, especially when you consider how hard it is to get that data in the first place due to high levels of unemployment. South Africa's unemployment rate hit record high when it increased to 26.7% in the last few days.

A lack of awareness about ad-blocking software could be the cause and answer to why South Africans would rather tolerate the annoyance of ads that consume their data than go to the trouble of finding and installing special ad-blocking software.

I cannot fathom a situation where a South African is very happy and impressed when upon visiting a website, they often find themselves waiting and waiting for advertisements to load. Video starts playing automatically, and animated ads jump in front of what they were there to see. The seconds tick by, followed by annoying and intrusive banner ads. Eventually, after so much personal data has been consumed and lost, and if they are lucky to have any data left, they get to see what they were there to see in the first place.

Very soon, South Africans will realise that life and experience on the internet does not have to be this difficult. There are easy ways to block such annoyances.

Not fetching a file or blocking it, which is what ad-blockers do, equates to pure, unadulterated internet experience and joy, except in the mind of advertisers, who think they have a right to put their stuff in consumers' faces. It's the consumers'

computers, smartphones, and internet connections. So it is their right to choose which files are fetched or blocked. When the advertisers pay for the consumers' connections, then they have a right to show consumers what they want, not before.
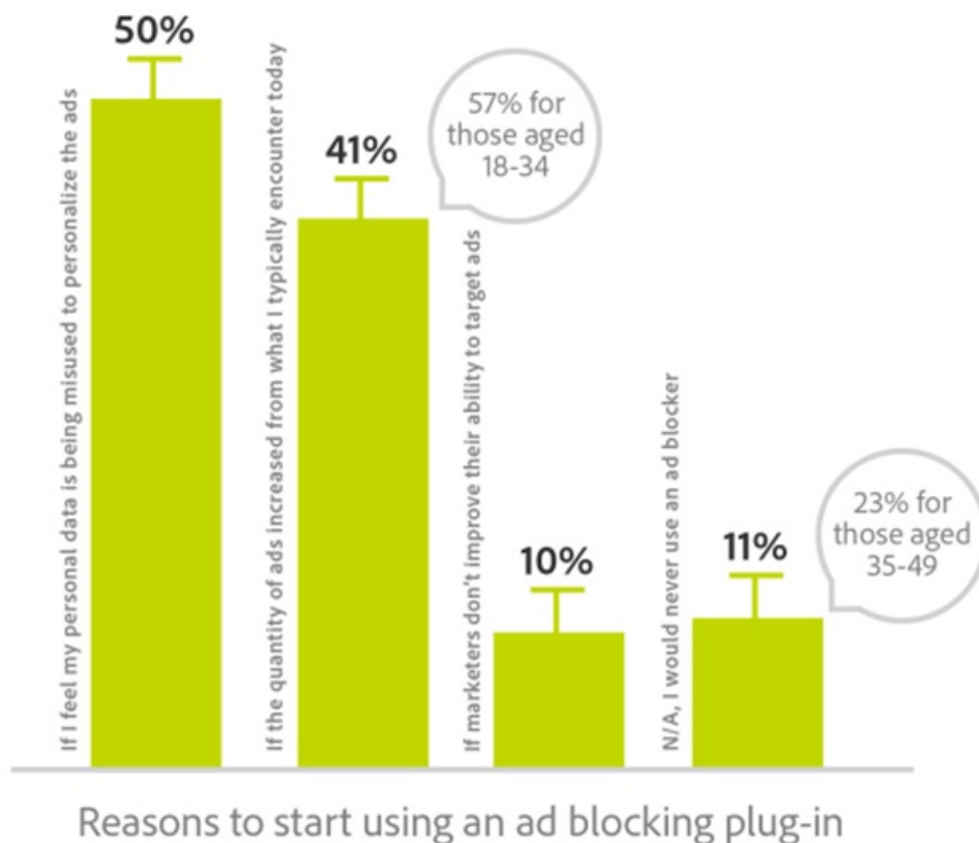
According to a research note from Strand Consult, published by Fin24 Tech, at least a fifth of your mobile data is consumed by advertising – a situation that has prompted the rise of ad-blocking software according to international research.

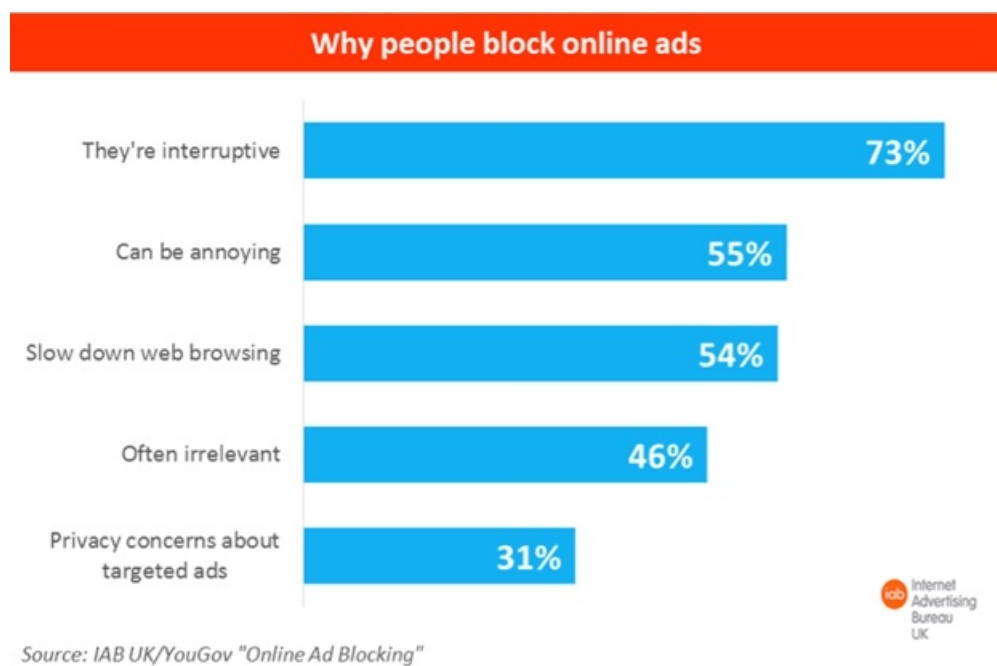The Strand Consult research reveals that 20% of data traffic on a smartphone is intrusive advertising.

"This is frequently traffic that subscribers don't want and haven't asked for. Video ads, in particular, slow the internet experience and can render in such a way to obstruct the actual content the user requests, not to mention burn out the device battery and run up the customer's data charges," Copenhagen-based Strand Consult said in a statement.

In SA, mobile services make up 24.7% of household budgets, almost five times higher than the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) guideline of 5%.

Mobile advertising is big business as companies rush to place their ads on small screens. According to eMarketer, mobile advertising in 2016 will hit $100bn, accounting for more than half of digital advertising spend.

Reasons to start using an ad blocking plug-in

Why people block online ads

They're interruptive	73%
Can be annoying	55%
Slow down web browsing	54%
Often irrelevant	46%
Privacy concerns about targeted ads	31%

Source: IAB UK/YouGov "Online Ad Blocking"

How to combat ad blocking?

Before we begin to answer, the key fact to acknowledge is that: **Consumers do not hate adverts; they simply hate irrelevant ads. Hence they resort to ad blocking!**

The key for the marketing and advertising industry is to challenge ourselves to serve better by offering more relevant ads to our audiences. We must be mindful of their frustrations with ad clutter and its negative impact on the brands we serve. We must treat consumers as individuals, rather than a demographic.

1. **Stop utter irrelevance, it is so annoying:** Do this by targeting meaningful content to the right viewer at the right time. Create more customised ad experiences that are good enough to combat ad blocking. Use an "Identifier" and create bespoke ad experiences. To effectively and successfully do so depends on having the data to drive such bespoke experiences.
2. **Programmatic advertising:** Let the machines do the work for you, artificial intelligence is the way to go. Do the strategy, the target definitions, buy ad space on digital platforms that support your brand and retailer, and then leave the dissemination of those ads up to machine decisions, based on data. Let programmatic advertising do the execution through algorithms. The results will be that the guys who are in the market for the new BMW get the adverts, and not all your mates, Nations that hate BMW, hippies, every 12-year old, quadriplegics and dogs just trying to make a connection on Dogbook. Truly customised messaging, delivered like a pizza..
3. **Block the ad blockers:** By blocking good content from people who use ad blockers, you are sending a message that says, "No more freeloaders." Find companies or technologies that specialise in countering ad blocking. Such companies and technologies can punch through the ad blocker or circumvent it in order to provide the revenue to the publisher. Publishers began to retaliate last year by blocking ad blockers, and several popular sites now show messages to any visitor running ad-blocker software. Messages range from gentle suggestions to purchase a subscription to actively hiding page content while an ad blocker remains active. So when you have an ad blocker enabled, you simply can't access an anti-ad blocker website and its content. You've been blocked.
4. **Offer fewer adverts of higher quality that appear in trusted environments:** Stop hitting people with bad-quality ads numerous times. Nobody wants to be tracked and advertised to constantly, period.
5. **Revive the good old 'word of mouth' by turning people into ads:** We know that word of mouth works. We also know that earned media works. 90% of consumers say they trust their family, friends and peers' recommendations, but only 33% trust ads.
6. **Pay the ad blockers To bypass them:** Yes, if you are really desperate and grasping at straws you could try this at your peril. Consumers will hate you, your brand and your retailer for it. You will have exposure and visibility, but at what cost? I would not want my retailers and brands to be loathed. Ad blockers prevent publishers from making

money. The idea of publishers giving up their money to ad blockers to make some of that money back is weird if not completely absurd. But it's already happening. Companies including Google, Amazon and Microsoft have paid AdBlock Plus to not block ads on their sites. Pay ad blockers such as Adblock Plus for the right to bypass them.

When it is not appropriate, relevant and specific to their particular shopping need at the time of that need.

Ad blocking is not the end of the marketing and advertising industry. It's simply an evolution point. Marketers and advertisers understand that advertising provides a valuable service in shaping and informing consumer behaviour, accelerating the economy, and enabling wide consumption of low-cost or free products, such as apps or music, where costs are deferred with advertisements.

Take the necessary steps to reduce the annoyance so that consumers won't turn to ad blockers. Stop exposing wrong ads to wrong target markets ad nauseam and ad infinitum.

*Unless otherwise stipulated, the stats and figures on the article, including the graphs, are based on PageFair.

Note that Bizcommunity staff and management do not necessarily share the views of its contributors - the opinions and statements expressed herein are solely those of the author.

ABOUT BANDILE NDZISHE

CEO, Founder & Global Consulting CMO at Bandzishe Group | CMO-Level Marketing Mastermind Bandile is a Prolific Growth Driver, a seasoned CMO-level global growth master marketer with 25+ years' practical marketing strategy experience, a multi-faceted EXCO-level Chief Marketing Officer, a board-level marketing mastermind and a consumer psychologist who delivers a broad range of strategic marketing planning, marketing management initiatives and digital marketing efforts that guarantee measurable sale results for businesses. Bandile generates an upsurge in new leads, sales and repeat business.
▪ How to deliver the only exceptional value shoppers want these December holidays - 8 Dec 2016
▪ Deals predictions, stores to watch and business case for SA retailers who adopt US Black Friday - 9 Nov 2016
▪ #ABSA-&-Coca-Cola-GET-IT: But can they convert the lives they changed into active brand communities? - 3 Nov 2016
▪ Is it wise for brands to insult black township consumers who are worth R100bn? - 12 Oct 2016
▪ #InnovationMonth: Mastering innovation and marketing at retail - 28 Sep 2016

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com