

Keeping Your Pop-Ups - and Your Audience

By Lauri Harpf

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In "Why Pop-Ups are Pop-Bad", we looked at the pitfalls of pop-up advertising, the most significant of them being the way Internet surfers feel about pop-ups. As I mentioned in that previous article, when you use pop-ups, you take the risk of your visitor count suffering and the reputation of your site being damaged. Despite that, many use pop-ups on their sites for a variety of reasons and are reluctant to cease using an advertising method they feel to be effective.

So, what is there to do? Is the only possibility to either make your visitors feel frustrated or drop your pop-ups? While your users would probably want to see the pop-ups disappear completely, that is not always possible. However, by making some slight changes to the way you use pop-ups, you can often achieve a result that satisfies both you and your visitors.

Maximum benefit, minimum trouble
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There are multiple ways to make your pop-ups more user friendly, here are some of my favorites. Try them out and see which ones work for you.

1. Imagine this. You arrive at a site and a pop-up ad appears. Being a veteran web-user, you close it quickly and continue investigating what the site has to offer. When you open the next page, the same pop-up comes up. Again, one click from your mouse and it is gone. On to the next page and the darn thing pops up yet again! Now you're getting annoyed and start looking for the exit.

OK, you probably didn't have to imagine that. If you've been on the web for a while, you're likely to have experienced it. Having the pop-up appear once didn't feel as bad, but when you had already looked at it and decided that you weren't interested in what it advertised, having it come up again and again made the site seem very unfriendly.

The moral of the story? Use cookies to identify your visitors and limit the amount of times the same pop-up is shown to the same user. Although it is claimed that on average, a person has to see the same ad several times before he'll react to it, enough is enough.

2. Do not use more than one pop-up on a single page. Using multiple pop-ups is unlikely to greatly increase the response rate to your advertising, but it will ensure that the patience of your visitors wears thin a lot faster. A horde of pop-ups appearing at the same time may crash some browsers and slow older computers down to a crawl.

3. Consider launching your pop-ups at the moment users exit your site rather than when they arrive to it. This is likely to make your advertisements seem less distracting, because at that point your visitors have already finished using your site and found the information they were looking for.

If you choose to use exit pop-ups, remember that they offer an excellent opportunity to retain contact with a visitor that may otherwise be lost in cyberspace. A pop-up to bookmark your site or subscribe to your newsletter is likely to work better at this stage, as the user has already seen that you run a high-quality site.

4. Just like all other forms of advertising you use, your pop-ups should offer content that is relevant to the topic of your site. For example, it's a much better idea to have a pop-up that sells subscriptions to Sports Illustrated on your Boston Bruins fan site than a pop-up for an Internet casino. Not only does it get a better response rate, but it also makes your site to look more professional.

5. Every time you add pop-up advertisements or adjust existing ones, keep a close eye on how your audience reacts to the changes. Your visitor count, the time an average visitor spends on your site and the number of page views per visitor are all important meters that will promptly notify you of any possible problems.

Lauri Harpf runs the A Promotion Guide website, where he offers free information about search engines, directories and other promotion methods. His site can be found at <http://www.apromotionguide.com/>

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