

# Why Pop-Ups are Pop-Bad

By Lauri Harpf

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A Promotion Guide <http://www.apromotionguide.com/>

Not too long ago, seeing a pop-up ad appear meant that you were either on a page that distributed illegal software or looking at something that isn't suitable for the eyes of under 18-year-olds. Back then, pop-ups were seen as an annoying but inseparable part of the Web's dark side. However, encountering them while visiting larger and more reputable Web sites was something that only a small amount of people could even dream about.

Nobody could have believed it at that time, but these yesterday's dreams have become the reality of today. In the eyes of many advertisers and webmasters, pop-ups have shaken off their dirty past and are now considered to be quite acceptable and harmless. Rather than the result of the general Internet population starting to see pop-ups in a better light, this change in attitude is more a case of making a virtue out of a necessity.

As everyone knows by now, the large dot-com's are in trouble and need cash. The continuing decrease in the click-through rates of banner ads has reduced the demand for banner space, and it is clear that the sites that live off advertising need something to replace this drying income stream. At the same time, an increasing amount of evidence seems to indicate that pop-up advertisements are more likely to be noticed and generate more sales than banner ads. Thus, it is no surprise that pop-ups have been able to break out of the dark side into the mainstream.

Follow the leader?

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After pop-ups started to appear on major websites, many webmasters of small- and middle-sized sites have begun to consider following in the footsteps of the big guys. After all, we've all heard countless success stories, and the users have probably already become accustomed to pop-ups and...

While it is certainly true that pop-ups can really work, it should be remembered that using them does also have multiple negative consequences. According to several sources, pop-ups do draw more attention than banners, but users are also very hostile towards them. For example, a Statistical Research report from last spring [1] claimed that pop-ups are 50% more likely to be noticed than banners, but also 100% more likely to be considered intrusive. Thus, by having pop-ups on your site, you're increasing the effectiveness of your advertising, but you're also hurting the reputation of your site and driving your visitors away.

Even if you're willing to accept the above side-effect, it is doubtful whether pop-ups can be used as a long term solution for the falling response rates to Internet advertising. As we remember from the past, banner ads had splendid click-through rates when they were introduced. Over time, the novelty wore off and click-through rates began to deteriorate. It is likely that pop-ups are doing so well partly because they've been used on a large scale for a relatively small amount of time. When pop-ups keep on spreading, users will eventually learn to ignore them as well.

The third problem with using pop-ups is born out of the two previous ones, the hatred users feel towards them and the fact that they are spreading like wildfire. Even now, a wide range of software that prevents pop-ups from being displayed is available for anyone to download for free. The use of such software isn't very common at the moment, but if pop-up advertising continues to grow, it is reasonable to assume that users will begin to install countermeasures at an increasing rate.

Some may doubt that software that removes pop-ups will never become a major concern, no matter how widely pop-ups are going to be used in the future. Software that removes banners from web pages has been out there for a long time, but it has never really "caught on". Why should this situation be any different?

The difference is that as stated in the Statistical Research report mentioned above, users find pop-ups to be more intrusive than banners. If each of the sites you visit displays two banner ads, you'll probably feel a bit annoyed, but put up with it. However, if they'd all launch two pop-ups, what would you do? I myself would be scrambling to download a copy of Pop-Up Stopper or PopUp Killer.

What's the point?

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If your alternatives are to either close your site or install pop-ups, the choice is not a hard one. But if your Internet business is doing fine and you're thinking about adding pop-ups to make it do even better, beware. Pop-ups can create profits, but they can also create trouble. Look before you leap.

[1]: Statistical Research: "How People Use (tm) the Internet 2001",  
<http://www.statisticalresearch.com/press/pr050301.htm>

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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  
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