Free Stuff: Banner Exchanges

By Richard Lowe

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Personally, I am not crazy about banner exchanges. I've tried them all, and without a single exception every one of them is completely lame as a traffic generator. In fact, the only thing that I've found that's worse than banner exchanges for getting hits to your site is Free For All lists (especially the mass FFA services).

All right, that being said, what is a banner exchange? These programs are a way for sites to be advertised at no cost on other sites. The concept is simple. Create a banner then submit it to the banner exchange. You must also add some code to your page (or pages) which displays a randomly chosen banner from the banner exchange program.

Each banner exchange program has a display ratio. A ratio of 1:1 means for each time you display one of the banner exchange banners, some other site will display one of your banners. A ratio of 2:1 means for every two banners you display, one of yours will be shown. Obviously the higher the ratio, the more often your banners will be displayed.

Some banner programs will give a higher conversion ratio if you include the banners on the front page, and an even higher ratio if the banner is on the top of your home page. The theory is this will give the most exposure to banner ads.

Some banner exchange programs also include a referral program, which usually gives you a higher conversion ratio if you get people to sign up. This can be useful if you are good at selling, although if you can sell people on banner exchanges you might consider selling a product which actually returns you some money instead (in other words, don't waste your time and efforts on these silly

programs).

Most banner exchanges work with the standard banner size of 468x80 pixels. Many programs also handle other size banners as well, all the way down to buttons of 88 x 31. A few exchanges also allow for text links, although they will usually require a 1x1 pixel web bug to be able to measure impressions.

When you submit your banner, virtually all services will not display it immediately on other sites. Instead, they will require that it be examined by a human being to ensure that it meets the qualifications of the service. These qualifications include:

Size - the better programs limit the size of the banner. Generally, the smaller the better. Remember, this is the size of banners that will be displayed on your site as well as others. Programs should not allow banners greater than 10k.

Animation - some programs do not allow animated banners.

Suitability - The banner program will examine your banner to ensure that it is aimed at the proper audience. For example, if they do not allow pornographic banners, than yours will be examined to ensure it is not adult in nature.

In addition, any decent exchange program will always hold your banner for examination if you resubmit a new one. Before you get angry at this practice, remember that it protects your site from unsuitable banners as well.

As I said at the beginning of this article, banner exchange programs of all flavors are an exceptionally poor way to generate traffic to your site. Because of this, be sure that you never, ever even consider paying anything for this service. Spend your money on something useful.

Remember that banner exchanges may not cost money, but they are not free by any means. Banners require:

- Additional load time on your pages. This can result in visitors leaving your site faster.

- Other people's web sites are advertised on your site, which can pull more traffic from your pages than you get from the program (especially with a bad conversion ratio).

- The danger that the banner exchange programs will sell or give your personal data (email address) to spammers or other evil doers.

- Since banner exchanges are such terrible traffic builders, you may be able to spend your time promoting your site in a more useful manner doing something else.

Some of the things that you should look for in a banner exchange program include:

- High conversion ratio. 1:1 or 7:8 is good. Many programs are 3:4 (barely acceptable) and some are 2:1 (I wouldn't bother). Anything worse - go somewhere else.

- Ensure that all banners are hand checked by human beings on the initial submit and resubmit. If their help pages do not state this explicitly, then ask. This protects your site from unsuitable banners.

- Ensure that the banners are stored on the banner exchange server. They will not tell you this, but you can find a site which uses their service and check the "Properties" of the banner. The image needs to be stored on their server so that it cannot be changed unless it goes through their manual checks for suitability.

- Be sure it will not cost you anything.

- If I had any interest in these programs, I would look for one that supported buttons (88 x 31) and even text links. This allows for faster load times. Text links also generally have a higher click-through ratio.

- A good set of reports so you can monitor how well the exchange is doing.

If you do sign up for one of these programs, be sure you check the statistics regularly. You need to look for two things:

- How many visitors have you received from the program?

- And how many visitors did you lose from the program?

If you consistently lose more visitors than you gain, then leave the program fast. This means you have a negative return on investment.

Here is a small selection of banner exchange services. In the current internet advertising environment, it is important to note that these services can come and go very quickly. Thus, this list may become obsolete in short order (I have found that I need to edit it about once per quarter to remove/modify over half the list).

123banners
http://www.123banners.com/
123banners has a 2:1 ratio and supports an odd-size, 400x40 banner which must be 10k or less in size.

ASInet
http://www.theasi.net/index-be.shtml
These guys have a 2:1 ratio.

Bannerexchanges
http://www.bannerexchanges.com/
Allows 468 x 60 pixel banners with a ratio of 2:1. They allow 25k size banners as well as animation.

BannerExpress
http://www.bannerexpress.com/
These guys don't state their ratio in their FAQ. They support an odd size banner (400x50) and the banner must be 10k or less in size.

Banner-X-Change
http://banner-x-change.net/
This program allows four different banner sizes - 468x60, 400x40, 120x60, and 88x31. They also give 2000 free impressions of their banner is shown at the top of the page, and they have a referral program.

Beseen

http://www.looksmartclicks.com/
One for one banner exchange program. This is one of the larger banner exchange programs (they claim over a million sites), which could result in lots of exposure.

Cybergate Banner Exchange
http://www.plustat.com/exchange/
A banner exchange program with a 3:2 ratio. Get 500 free credits when you sign up, and they have a referral program.

Exchange-It
http://www.exchange-it.com/
These guys have a 2:1 ratio and support 468 x 60 banners.

Free-Banners
http://home.free-banners.com/
Free-banners has a 2:1 ratio with a 3 tier referral program.

Xlinkx
http://www.xlinkx.com/
They have a 3:2 ratio and have a program for general as well as adult sites. They allow 400x40, 400x50, or 468x68 banners, which must be 12k or less.

Additional Information

Banner Creation
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Bannercreation.htm
You have many tools available to create banners

Banner Services
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Bannerservices.htm
You need to create some banners? Here are some services (free and paid) for you to check out.

Banner Sizes
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Bannersizes.htm
Here are the standard sizes for the various banners. This is a general agreement among advertisers.

Banner Tips
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Bannertips.htm
This page includes some tips to help you with your banner campaigns.

The ins and outs of banner advertising
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Banners.htm
Join a free or for pay banner exchange program to get people to visit your site.

Sins of the internet - Banners
http://www.internet-tips.net/Legal/sins_banners.htm
Banner ads not only look terrible, increase load times and cause site failures, they don't even work.

You Can Do Better Than Banner Exchanges
http://www.internet-tips.net/Advertising/Bannerexchanges.htm
Think you want to join a banner exchange to get people to visit your site? Think again.

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