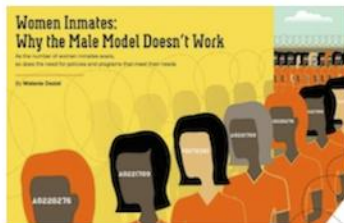


Readers Hate Sponsored Content, But Netflix Did it Right

Sponsored content is an important part of today's native advertising strategies. Native advertising pieces are intended to fit into a publisher's platform by mimicking the qualities of the publisher. For example, native advertising on Twitter would look just like a regular Tweet. On BuzzFeed, a sponsored post might look like a numbered list intended to be shared socially – just like the majority of BuzzFeed's content. These strategies are often used as an alternative to things like banner ads, which are generally thought to be widely ignored by Internet users. However, [a new study](#) from Contently actually shows that most users have a deep distrust of sponsored content.



People Are Confused About Sponsored Content

The Contently survey presented 13 questions to 542 American Internet users. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65. Not only was it revealed that readers didn't trust sponsored content, but **many participants also didn't have a clear understanding of what sponsored content even means**. Many participants thought that "sponsored content" involved an advertiser paying for a post and having some influence on the post's content, which for the most part is true. On the other hand, 52 percent of respondents thought sponsored content involved something else.

Here's the big revelation though: **54 percent of participants indicated they don't trust sponsored content**. Most people indicated they'd actually rather see banner ads, despite banner's notoriously low click-through rate. Other startling stats include:

- Mistrust increased as a reader's education level went up
- 59 percent think that a publisher's site loses credibility when running sponsored content
- 66 percent indicated feelings of deceit after realizing content they read or viewed was brand-sponsored

The results may be indicative of an overall mistrust of content, however, as respondents still thought that sponsored content would be just as trustworthy as anything on MSNBC. Fox News was considered even less trustworthy than content sponsored by a brand.

Native Advertising Can Work – It Already Did for Netflix

The results of this survey are pretty grim, but it's definitely not yet time to throw the idea out. Publishers may be partly to blame for the confusion, as phrases like "paid posts," "partner stories," and "brand posts" mean different things to different publishers, as well as to different users. Native advertising is typically used to **favorably influence a user's perception of a brand**, rather than for getting direct sales. Publishers and brands are now challenged to find a way to accomplish this without leaving readers feeling confused or tricked.

Perhaps the best way to keep a user's opinion of a sponsored post high is to ensure the content is interesting and valuable. According to Tony Haile of Chartbeat, [only 24 percent of users scroll down on native ad content](#). So, you'll really need to make sure that users are getting something out of the content if they don't want to feel deceived once they've realized it was sponsored.

One of the most talked about examples of good native advertising involves a paid post in the New York Times that promotes the original Netflix series *Orange Is The New Black*. The post, which can be [seen here](#), provides a plethora of interesting information about women in prison and how the system could be improved. It contains real stats, charts and videos while making many compelling arguments. **It's a fantastic piece of journalism and it's sponsored content**. Also, the fact that it's paid for by Netflix is clearly presented to the reader in the article header and the title tag.

So what do you think? Could native advertising have a future when done correctly? Or is further integration just more deceptive?