

Buying and selling advertising space and sponsorship

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This guidance, formerly Chapter 1.3 of the Guidelines for UK Government Websites, is for website management and marketing teams. It describes the basic principles of buying and selling advertising and entering into a sponsorship relationship with a third party.

Note: While much has changed since this document was originally written, including updated versions of software and coding standards, the broad principles it espouses remain valid.

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Background

Advertising on the web is envisaged as being a revenue stream for government websites. It can reduce the cost of providing government information and services, which saves the taxpayer money or results in better quality services and faster delivery of information and services on-line. It is a perfectly legitimate thing to do as long as the guidelines are adhered to.

Sponsors fund parts of a government publicity project, or support it by providing services or equipment. They do this in exchange for visible acknowledgement. This can be understood as implying a closer relationship than advertising. Therefore particular care is needed to make clear that both your Department and your website retain their independence in every way.

Over time, it is likely that advertising and sponsorship will become increasingly important as ways of funding the provision of information and services or developing websites. It is expected that guidance here will need to be regularly revisited, as markets develop.

Contract management

1. The management of advertising or sponsorship arrangements can be established using the following routes:
 - in-house management of web space to be made available for advertising or other means of publicity agreed under a sponsorship agreement, or
 - the use of a third party supplier to manage the advertising or sponsorship web space on your behalf.
2. The available costs, benefits and expertise are key factors when deciding which route will suit your organisation. All must be examined and included in the evaluation of the business case for making use of advertising or sponsorship to raise potential commercial revenues.

Advertising

3. Using the Internet for advertising falls into two distinct categories:
 - **Selling** advertising or sponsorship space on your website, and
 - **Buying** advertising space on other websites.
4. Selling advertising space on Government websites is not an easy task. This is a rapidly evolving and fiercely competitive area and a dedicated, trained resource is required to managed, sell and promote this service. You are advised to source help from specialist agencies, eg, Central Office of Information (COI).
5. The full value should be obtained from the sale of advertising on government websites.
6. Departments and agencies need to judge carefully the balance between the effort required to achieve the maximum value and the income that is earned. Payment for web advertising may not be based on space alone, but on the number of page downloads or 'clicks on the ad'. Alternatively, an advertiser may wish to sell 'button space' on your website. These are fixed graphics with links to the advertised organisation's own website or campaign, paid for at a fixed rate for a fixed period of time, sometimes regardless of the number of page impressions or 'clicks through'.
7. Advertisers may expect there to be a link between known user interest and who sees the advert. You will probably need to be able to prove levels of access.
 - in designing pages, you should ensure that advertisers' brands do not compete with or detract from the effectiveness, integrity and appearance of their own branding or that of the government as a whole.
 - attention should be given to avoid any implication of endorsement of products or services or of contradiction between government messages and those of advertisers.
 - Website users are often irritated by pop-up advertisements and related technologies (variously referred to as 'interstitials', 'superstitials') and particularly by those that draw animations within the main window overlaying the page content. It is therefore recommended that advertisements on government websites should be confined to the use of banners and buttons.
 - where banner and button advertising space is included in Web pages, it is recommended the dimensions should conform to those of the industry-standard [Ad Unit Guidelines defined by The Interactive Advertising Bureau](#)

- [\(IAB\)](#).¹ Advertisers should be advised to bear in mind the range of connection speeds used by visitors to government websites and the implications for viable file sizes of advertisement content.
- with images and animations ensure use of the <alt> attribute to describe the function of each visual;
 - if you are using information about user behaviour to sell advertising space, you must not breach your own website's published privacy statement (see section 1.10) and if in any doubt you must ask the advice of your Data Protection Officer.

¹ IAB Ad Unit Guidelines <http://www.iab.net/standards/adunits.asp>

The buying of advertising space on other websites

8. As the market place is in constant evolution and having a strategic approach to Internet advertising is required. Unlike traditional advertising space, the Internet does not benefit widely from independent audience audits. Traffic claims can be variable and you must ask for specific information – page impressions, from where specific information and pages are requested, etc – and make judgements on the effectiveness of an individual site against the site operator's claims.
9. In line with your overall media communications strategy specialist agencies are best placed to carry out the following tasks for you:
 - planning an internet advertising campaign using various sites and methods of reaching your target audience;
 - negotiating the approved plan to ensure maximum value for money;
 - implementing the approved plan to ensure that the adverts appear on time and in the right place, and
 - optimising campaigns through identification of the most appropriate web pages to be used for advertising, analysis of page impressions and 'click through' and the published performance of individual sites.

Sponsorship

10. Sponsorship may be a useful means of saving public expenditure. Like all government publicity projects, websites should observe the guidance given in the [Cabinet Office Guidance for Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities](#).² These guidelines should be consulted in full. Like all government guidelines they are subject to amendment and update.

11. In general, sponsorship:

- must avoid any suggestion that the sponsors will be sympathetically regarded for other purposes;
- must be seen to add significant benefit;
- should add to, not replace, core funding for the project
- cannot be given by firms which are involved in significant commercial negotiations with the department or are licensed/regulated by it;
- should be sought in an open and even handed manner between organisations in a particular field, using the appropriate public sector procurement methods to secure the contractual arrangements;
- must not be an endorsement by Government of the sponsor or its products or services;
- must not dilute the effectiveness of your website or the message that lies behind it. Sponsors cannot influence the messages of Government communication in their business area;
- must not bring adverse publicity to the project;
- must be of websites and not of individual Ministers or civil servants;
- does not place a Minister or a Department under an obligation to a sponsor.

12. Sponsorship of individual amounts, including value-in-kind, of more than £5,000 must be disclosed in Departmental Annual Reports.

13. To measure the value of in-kind sponsorship, where the sponsor provides goods or services that benefit of the project, Departments should consider the opportunity cost, ie, how much it would have cost the department if it had paid for the support provided. Ongoing costs should also be taken into account for the lifetime of the sponsorship agreement.

14. Returns to the sponsor must be specified in writing as part of the sponsorship agreement. The agreement should cover, for example, the display of the name of the sponsor or whether there is to be a link to the sponsor's website.

² Cabinet Office Guidance for Departments on Sponsorship of Government Activities
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/civil_service/sponsorship_guidelines.asp

15. Credit to a sponsor must never create confusion about branding or your website's identity.
16. Credit to a sponsor should only occur on those parts of your web space where the sponsor is directly contributing to its provision. This should be specified in the sponsorship agreement.
17. Acknowledgement should be concise. A company logo, if used, must not distract from clear branding of your website's own identity or any government branding. A company logo must be seen as appropriate and must not be of a size that is visually or perceived to be visually larger or more important than any official or campaign logo. A link to the sponsor's own web page is perfectly okay. To retain your audience, you may wish to have it open in a new browser window.
18. If these guidelines have been followed, then no specific disclaimer for this instance of sponsorship should be necessary. It should be evident that the source of sponsorship is appropriate. It is, however, your responsibility to ensure that this relationship cannot be misinterpreted.
19. In the case that a disclaimer is necessary to avoid the semblance of an inappropriate relationship with the company, then it should be placed next to the credit line in the same heading level and typeface and on the same page. This is because disclaimers that are a link away from a credit have not in practice proved to be effective at avoiding the appearance of a problem.
20. It would be useful if the government's policy on sponsorship is included were the disclaimer information just off the home page together with an assertion that all sponsorship of the site meets these criteria.

The commercial value of credits

21. The giving of credit to suppliers of web services that you employ directly within the functionality of your website can have commercial value. Significant reductions to the cost of features such as search engines can be negotiated especially if logos and links to suppliers' sites are granted. The value will vary with the popularity of the specific web pages (as shown in page impressions), and the relevance of the service to your readership.
22. The giving of credit to suppliers of web services, for example, by name, by email address, particularly if within your metadata will also have commercial value. Reductions to costs should be negotiated.

More information and guidance on advertising and sponsorship is available from the [Central Office of Information](#).³

³ Central Office of Information <http://www.coi.gov.uk/>