

Build your child's media literacy: digital advertising

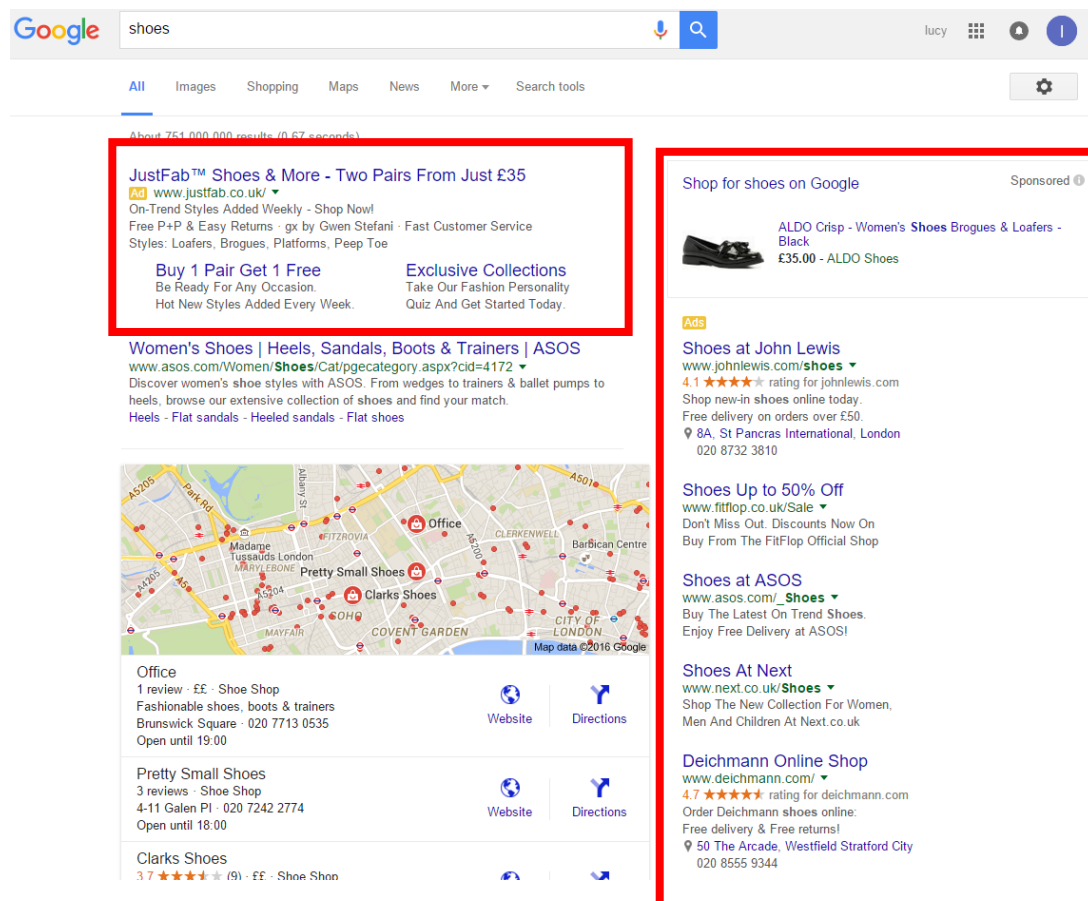
According a recent Ofcom report, only a minority of 8-11s (16%) and 12-15s (31%) were able to correctly identify advertising displayed in online search results.¹ Understanding advertising has always been a key part of developing children's media literacy. The online world forms a huge part of your child's interaction with media. Here are some key facts about online advertising that your child should be aware of.

Adverts on search engines

Advertising keeps Google and many of the websites and services that you use free of charge.

Often the top few search results on Google are sponsored advertisements, even if they are what your child has searched for. The results along the right hand side of the page are usually ads, too.

You can recognise ads by looking at where the search results on the page are, and if it says 'Ad' or 'sponsored' beside them. We've drawn red rectangles around the ads on this search result page, below, which you can show to your children.

The screenshot shows a Google search for 'shoes'. The search bar at the top contains 'shoes' and the Google logo. Below the search bar, there are tabs for 'All', 'Images', 'Shopping', 'Maps', 'News', and 'More'. The search results are divided into two main sections: organic results on the left and sponsored results on the right.

Organic Results (Left):

- JustFab™ Shoes & More - Two Pairs From Just £35** (Sponsored, highlighted with a red box). Includes details like 'www.justfab.co.uk', 'On-Trend Styles Added Weekly', and 'Buy 1 Pair Get 1 Free'.
- Women's Shoes | Heels, Sandals, Boots & Trainers | ASOS**. Includes a map showing nearby shoe stores like 'Office', 'Pretty Small Shoes', and 'Clarks Shoes'.

Sponsored Results (Right):

- Shop for shoes on Google** (Sponsored, highlighted with a red box). Features an image of a shoe and text: 'ALDO Crisp - Women's Shoes Brogues & Loafers - Black £35.00 - ALDO Shoes'.
- Shoes at John Lewis** (Ad, highlighted with a red box). Includes a 4.1 star rating and address: '8A, St Pancras International, London'.
- Shoes Up to 50% Off** (Ad, highlighted with a red box). From 'fitflop.co.uk/Sale'.
- Shoes at ASOS** (Ad, highlighted with a red box). From 'www.asos.com/Shoes'.
- Shoes At Next** (Ad, highlighted with a red box). From 'www.next.co.uk/Shoes'.
- Deichmann Online Shop** (Ad, highlighted with a red box). From 'www.deichmann.com/'.

¹ Ofcom Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report

http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/children-parents-nov-15/childrens_parents_nov2015.pdf

Activity

To help younger children understand online advertising, start by asking them what they think 'adverts' are, and where they can find them. Maybe they'll have some ads in mind that they've noticed recently. You can then steer the conversation to online advertising. Sit down with them and search for something on your web browser, asking them to point out which results are ads, and which aren't. You can then show your child the image above and explain how they can identify which search results are ads or not. Explain that search results at the top of the page may be adverts that are trying to sell them something - not what they're actually looking to find.

You can also go on a few websites your child likes visiting and point out to them which pieces of content are adverts.

With older children, start a conversation with them about what they know about online advertising, and fill in any gaps in their knowledge.

It's important that your child understands the difference between advertising and normal content. This will make them less susceptible to online scams, (see our previous handout and presentation on phishing and online scams) and be more discerning before clicking on anything.

Thinking critically about what they do online also helps build their resilience, making them less susceptible to other risks.

Cookies

Your child probably would have heard of cookies, but they may be unsure exactly what they're used for. It's worth explaining to them what they are so they have a better understanding of how this sort of targeted advertising works. The points below will help them understand what they are, how they work and what they're used for.

- **Cookies save a record of your online habits on your browser, using this information to tailor advertising specifically to you.**
- Often when you visit a site for the first time, a tiny text file called a cookie is saved onto your web browser. Normally a pop-up appears asking if you're happy for the site you're on to use cookies.
- Cookies monitor information such as which webpages you look at on a website, how long you spend on them, and what you click on.

Targeted advertising

Having this information means that a website can tailor its advertising based on your personal web history. For instance, it can be helpful to vary content according to whether this is your first ever visit to a site – or your 101st. Cookies can also stop you from seeing the same advert over and over again, and show more relevant ads. That's why a website completely unrelated to travel may be advertising flights if you've been searching travel plans for your next holiday.

Some feel uncomfortable with the idea of this sort of data collection: storing personal information about you to build an idea of your browsing habits. But, cookies can be helpful too – they can save information such as the items in your shopping cart, making online shopping a much easier experience. They can also help detect and stop click fraud. To stop your browser (such as Internet Explorer or Google Chrome) from saving a record of the sites you have visited/ searched for, you can choose to go into Incognito mode ([Chrome](#)) or use InPrivate browsing ([Internet Explorer](#)).