IAB Ad Unit Guidelines
2009 Update

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This document has been developed by the IAB's Reimagining Interactive Advertising Taskforce and reviewed by the IAB's Ad Ops and Sales Executive Councils.

About the IAB's Reimaging Interactive Advertising Taskforce:
The Reimagining Interactive Advertising Taskforce was formed to represent the entire interactive ecosystem. Members from creative and media agencies, publishers, networks, and vendors meet to discuss creativity, strategic marketing, media planning and buying, and publisher insights and challenges. Their goal is to create solutions that allow the ecosystem to further harness the power of digital media.

About the IAB's Ad Ops Council:
The IAB Ad Ops Council is dedicated to improving the operational efficiency of interactive advertising. Ad Ops Council working groups regularly include agency-side representatives to help improve communication, understanding, and work process in many areas of the buyer-seller relationship. A full list of Council member companies can be found at:
http://www.iab.net/member_center/councils/ad_ops_council

About the IAB's Sales Executive Council:
The IAB Sales Executive Council is comprised of senior sales leadership at IAB general member companies. The Council is dedicated to furthering the interests of ad-supported interactive properties and focuses on providing thought leadership on issues critical to the growth of interactive advertising revenue, establishing and sharing best sales practices, and on creating programs that foster the highest standards of media sales professionalism among member companies' organizations. A full list of Council member companies can be found at:
http://www.iab.net/member_center/councils/sales_executive_council

This document can be found on the IAB website at: http://www.iab.net/ad_unit

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Overview

In early 2009, the IAB launched its Reimagining Interactive Advertising initiative by bringing leaders from creative agencies, media agencies, and publishers together to discuss the next creative evolution of digital marketing. The newly formed Reimagining Interactive Advertising Taskforce decided that its first order of business would be to review the IAB Ad Unit Guidelines. The IAB Ad Unit Guidelines concern animated in-page display ads, such as standard Flash files, flat JPGs, or animated GIFs. Rich media ad units are also reviewed annually but through separate guidelines because of their additional creative and technological complexity.

Each year, the IAB reviews its Ad Unit Guidelines by convening a working group of its membership. Because of the Reimagining group's input, the 2009 Ad Unit Sizes Working Group included creative and media agencies for the first time. The joint publisher-agency working group updated the criteria for inclusion as a standard ad unit by looking at industry-wide impression count reports, ad unit availability, agency-side effectiveness reviews, and creative preferences. With the new criteria, it made recommendations on the current list of eighteen standard ad units, including:

- In order to be considered a standard, an ad unit must be commonly bought and offered throughout the marketplace; only seven of the eighteen ad units currently on the list meet this new criteria
- Ad units will not be removed from the standards list in 2009, but must meet the criteria by the end of 2010
- Adoption of new, innovative, effective ad units across networks and publishers will be encouraged by the IAB through a separate process

Ad Unit Sizes Working Group

The Reimagining Interactive Advertising Taskforce convened the annual Ad Unit Sizes Working Group to develop updated recommendations. The following publishers and agencies were represented:

24/7 Real Media, Inc.	Microsoft Advertising
Barbarian Group	MTV Networks
BBDO	NBC Universal Digital Media
Butler, Shine, Stern & Partners	New York Times Digital
Carat	Ogilvy
Cars.com	AOL Advertising
CBS Interactive	Razorfish
CNN.com	ShortTail
Condé Nast Digital	Time Inc.
Disney Interactive Media Group	Universal McCann
Eyeblaster	Univision Interactive Media
Google, Inc.	Vivaki
McKinney	Yahoo!, Inc.
Media Two	

New Standards Criteria

Over the past several years, the number of IAB Standard Ad Units had grown to a total of eighteen (18) different units. The working group agreed that there were too many "standard" ad units and quantitative analysis found many of the ad units represented less than 1% of the total marketplace impression traffic being monitored by several vendors. The group sought to create a decision framework consisting of objective and subjective inputs and considered the following during its review:

1. **Impression weight:** Although it includes large amounts of network inventory, impression weight (how many instances of an ad-size are delivered throughout the internet) can be monitored over time to indicate buyer and seller adoption trends

2. **Availability:** As an additional quantitative input, common availability of ad units across publishers was considered; the IAB's Creative Specs Database was used to analyze offerings across hundreds of companies

3. **Effectiveness:** Agencies and publishers were asked to report on effectiveness of ad units, as determined by their own subjective and objective measures, to determine if patterns from the quantitative inputs needed further consideration

4. **Creative preference:** Understanding which ad units were "creative-friendly" was used as a final input in the process

During further discussions on how ad size and creative considerations could be synthesized in the update process, the joint publisher-agency group made several determinations:

1. Standard ad units should represent the most commonly bought ad units for the same reasons behind the creation of the Universal Ad Package: operational efficiency and ease of buying reach

2. Any changes to the standard ad units list are meant solely to achieve these two results and should not be construed in any way as discouraging ad unit innovation; custom or unique ad products are a normal and critical part of media plans, and publishers, vendors, and agencies are encouraged to continue developing and supporting non-standard ad units

3. The most commonly bought ad units will remain so only if they continue to prove themselves through results

4. Adoption of non-standard ad sizes, especially those found to be highly effective, should be encouraged by trade organizations such as the IAB in an industry-wide process, but should not be included as standards until impression weight and/or availability reach market scale

Encouragement of "Rising Star" Ad Units

For much of the past year, the marketing-media ecosystem has been engaged in a vigorous and healthy debate about the role interactive advertising plays in building brands online. Many industry participants have expressed the belief that existing standard ad units do not facilitate all the brand-building requirements of marketers and their agencies. The IAB believes there is a need to encourage the development of more "brand-hospitable" ad units that, with appropriate testing and adoption, can become accepted standards.

In order to encourage the development of innovative, effective ad units, initially as non-standards but with the expectations that some standards can and will develop, the IAB and its joint agency-publisher Reimagining Interactive Advertising Taskforce are developing the first list of ad unit "Rising Stars," to be released in early 2010. In conjunction with the beginning of the evaluation phase for each year's ad unit review, this list of "Rising Stars" will be developed and released to help encourage adoption by both publishers and advertisers.

While the new criteria for standard ad units have clear objective thresholds, the more qualitative Effectiveness and Creative Preference criteria will factor more heavily in the "Rising Stars" selection process. This will ensure that innovation will play an important role in how ad units become standards.

Ad Unit Guidelines Recommendations

Based on these discussions, the Ad Unit Sizes Working Group recommends the following:

1. The IAB Ad Unit Guidelines will be updated on an annual basis by the working group to include only ad units that are found to:
   a. Make up 5% or more of the market's impressions
   b. Be offered by a large number of publishers and networks (exact number will be determined by the working group each year based on various inputs)

   If an ad unit is close to meeting these two criteria but does not clearly qualify, the additional criteria of Effectiveness and Creative Preference will be used to make final determinations.

2. The list of standard units will be kept to a minimum.

3. To give publishers and agencies time to acclimate to the new criteria, no ad units will be removed from the standard ad package until the end of 2010; instead the units that meet the new criteria will be listed separately from those that have not; if the units that do not meet the new criteria still do not qualify by the end of 2010, they will be eliminated from the Ad Unit Guidelines during the Ad Sizes Working Group review.

Standard Ad Units Meeting New Criteria
Seven units met the new criteria for being a standard ad unit:

Medium Rectangle	**300x250**
Rectangle	**180x150**
Leaderboard	**728x90**
Wide Skyscraper	**160x600**
Half Page Ad	300x600
Button #2	120x60
Micro Bar	88x31

These seven units accounted for approximately 80% of total impression weight over the past 12 months and each had broad availability along with favorable effectiveness/creative preference assessments.

The four units listed in **bold** make up the Universal Ad Package (UAP). Launched in 2002, the UAP was meant to reduce the costs and inefficiencies associated with planning, buying, and creating online media. As the 2009 review shows, the UAP has been widely adopted and the four sizes still account for the vast majority of impression weight in the marketplace. Any publisher who offers the UAP must be able to reach the majority of its audience through the set of four ad sizes. The Ad Unit Guidelines, as well as creative guidelines covering rich media and digital media, expanded upon the UAP because of an industry need for further standardization across a number of additional ad types, including increasingly popular smaller sizes (e.g. Button #2, Micro Bar). The UAP has not been changed since its launch, but future Ad Unit Sizes Working Groups will consider expansion if the standard ad unit list can be effectively kept to a manageable number of sizes.

Standard Ad Units Not Meeting New Criteria
All of the units below failed to meet the Impression Weight and Availability criteria by large margins:

Square Pop Up	250x250
Vertical Rectangle	240x400
Large Rectangle	336x280
3:1 Rectangle	300x100
Pop Under	720x300
Full Banner	468x60
Half Banner	234x60
Button #1	120x90
Vertical Banner	120x240
Square Button	125x125
Skyscraper	120x600

These units will not be removed from the standards list in 2009. However, if publishers or agencies would like to see these ad units continue to be considered as standard, the units must be made available by a much broader number of publishers and bought in much larger numbers by agencies. Any unit that does not meet the new criteria by the end of 2010 will be removed from the list.