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Social networking sites are attracting more attention from users across the globe, but back in '04, consumption of news and entertainment



## Making Distinctions in Contextual Advertising

By Hollis Thomases, ClickZ, Dec 2, 2008

As one of the oldest forms of online advertising, contextual advertising has come a long way since the Web's early days and, as a consequence, defining it precisely has become more of a challenge. Contextual advertising used to differentiate itself from display advertising by the fact that it meant specifically text-only ads. Turning to Princeton University's WordNet definition of "contextual," "relating to or determined by or in context," let's make some clearer distinctions about today's options in contextual advertising.

### Methods of Placement

We can segregate contextual ad serving into four main categories:

- By keyword, in context
- By keyword, in text
- By context, in content
- By content ownership

These days, contextual advertising isn't limited to text-only ads. Display ads can be contextually served, which opens up a whole new door for relevancy.

### Keyword, In Context

The most well-known form of contextual advertising falls into this category. In this method, the advertiser selects keywords she feels would be relevant to the campaign. Page content is then crawled with the advertising technology determining that content's relevancy. Dynamically, this relevancy is matched to the advertiser's keyword and the ad is served.

The most popular delivery of the keyword-in-context placement is through Google's Content Network, known to publishers as AdSense. Last month, likely in an effort to capture more of the do-it-yourself advertising market, Google launched its [display ad builder](#) with templates that also include video and game ads.

Year-old [BuzzLogic](#) offers a variation on keyword-in-context advertising with its conversation ad targeting network. BuzzLogic matches advertisers' conversation queries, primarily within the context of blog postings.

### Keyword, In Text

With keyword-in-text advertising, ads are associated with and served only when a reader mouses over an actual keyword found within text. The technology works by pixels placed on participating publishers' sites to monitor changes and to capture text. Advertisers supply an approved list of keywords against which they would like their ads to appear. Once the technology finds keyword matches, the keyword is linked to the advertisement and underlined or highlighted to catch the reader's attention. Mousing over the keyword launches a pop-up "caption" frame, into which the ad is served. Ads can be text-plus-logo or display, including video. The main players in keyword-in-text advertising include [Kontera](#) and [Vibrant Media](#).

### Context, In Content

Through various crawling, algorithmic matching, and ad-serving technologies, context-in-content advertising attempts to offer advertisers a different means to target than strictly by keyword. The genesis of the selection process may begin with keywords, but it ends with a matching process that lets an advertiser choose by site (e.g., Google Content Network's Site Targeting), by category ([ContextWeb](#)), by semantics ([iSense](#)), or by multiple options ([AdBrite](#)). These kinds of solutions help advertisers hone or broaden their reach, depending upon the campaign's needs.

### Content Ownership

When the entire article you read is really all bought and paid for, that's content ownership, or [advertorial](#). Besides the direct buy, there's also [AdFusion](#), which is an interesting blend of advertorial and newswire-like network. AdFusion's team interviews the advertiser, writes the article containing links back to the advertiser, then makes the article available to its network of news and information sites. These sites decide if the content is relevant to their readers and post articles they select.

### Contextual Advertising's Performance

Contextual advertising has survived all these years because contextual advertising *works*. Inventory isn't the issue. The saying "content is king" rings true, and the rise of social media has generated more content into which advertising can be served than ever before, with targeting technology that's ever more advanced and transparent.

Contextual advertising usually runs on a CPC ([define](#)) basis, which also makes it attractive to performance advertisers, though I could make the case of contextual's value to brand advertisers just as easily. Like search, contextual advertising is a workhorse. Just be careful of smaller, less-proven networks.

### Buying Contextual Advertising

One down side to contextual advertising is that DIY rules in some systems. There might not even be a media rep to answer your questions. These platforms don't facilitate ad serving and, consequently, data reporting can be thin. You might not ever know how many ad impressions were served to what sites or even on what sites your ads appeared. If performance is a concern, buy small and test.

Go ahead. Dip your toe in. Though there are many types, contextual advertising isn't as confusing as it might seem.

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