

Uncovering the unsettling trend in OOH advertising

Issued by [Advertising Media Forum](#)

28 Nov 2023

In the dynamic landscape of OOH advertising, an alarming issue has been quietly spreading, and it poses a significant risk to brands, clients, and media agencies alike: the issue of brokering, which often includes false representation of sites and blatant deception regarding site ownership. This concern requires immediate attention and strategic intervention to safeguard the integrity of campaigns and protect stakeholders from potential legal ramifications. Unfortunately, the misconduct of some reflects poorly on the whole hence it's in the best interests of those media owners who conduct themselves with integrity to clean up the overall brokering act.



Over the past year, an issue that has long lingered in the shadows of the industry has become increasingly unmanageable. Media owners, responsible for selling advertising spaces, are now venturing into questionable territory by attempting to sell sites they either do not own or have only a joint venture affiliation with. This practice, often referred to as 'brokering sites' has created a pervasive challenge for media agencies, clients, and brands alike. Whilst brokering is not a new practice, the layer of deception by some by deliberately misleading agencies is new and it's doing the good guys a disservice.

The gravity of the situation becomes apparent when examining the scale of the problem. In a standard practice, media agencies reach out to various media owners when seeking advertising spaces for their clients. However, it has become routine for media agencies to receive site proposals from owners who, in reality, have no ownership stake in the sites they are marketing. This misinformation not only confounds media planning efforts but also presents a serious risk for OOH buying teams.

The core issue lies in media owners presenting themselves as legitimate owners of advertising sites, even when the reality is quite different. Marketing materials and company branding further perpetuate this facade, making it challenging for media agencies to distinguish between genuine site owners and those merely brokering the spaces.

In recent incidents that underscore the severity of the problem, media owners have gone beyond misrepresentation and engaged in site 'hijacking'. This involves one media owner illegitimately claiming ownership of another's site, leading to legal disputes that ensnare media agencies in the middle of a complex and potentially litigious situation.

A particularly troubling case involved a media owner who, after 'hijacking' a site, claimed it was a mistake. This excuse, however, was undermined when the same incident occurred a second time. The resulting legal battles between the media owners, compounded by the cancelled contracts and subsequent fallout, highlight the urgent need for industry-wide awareness and decisive action.

In light of these challenges, media agencies and brands must tread carefully in the OOH advertising space. Vigilance in verifying site ownership, conducting due diligence on media owners, and implementing contractual safeguards are imperative to mitigate risks. Additionally, industry stakeholders, including regulatory bodies and trade associations, must collaborate to establish and enforce ethical standards that discourage deceptive practices.

The escalating trend of media owners brokering or falsely claiming ownership of OOH advertising sites poses a serious threat to the industry's credibility. Brands, clients, and media agencies must unite to address this issue head-on, fostering transparency, ethical conduct, and legal compliance. Only through collective effort can the OOH advertising landscape be cleansed of deceptive practices, ensuring a trustworthy and secure environment for all stakeholders involved.

In the meanwhile, choosing to work through those media partners in whom we can place our trust and our client's budgets will ensure that ethics win at the end of the day. To these ethical partners, we thank you.

Contributed by The AMF Board

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The Advertising Media Forum (AMF) is a collective of media agencies and individuals including media strategists, planners, buyers and consultants through whom 95% of all media expenditure in South Africa is bought. The AMF advises and represents relevant organisations and aims to create open channels of communication and encourage and support transparent policies, strategies and transactions within the industry.

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