

affiliate marketing commission validation recommended practices



Affiliate marketing is a well-established and integral component of the digital marketing landscape. Partnering with advertisers, publishers, networks, agencies, and other third parties, the IAB Australia Affiliate & Partnership Marketing Working Group is committed to upholding industry credibility and fostering sustainable growth.

This best practice guide provides advertisers with actionable insights on enhancing affiliate relationships by prioritising transparency. It serves as a foundational resource for those new to the channel and a strategic guide for advertisers seeking to strengthen their partnerships.

The Importance of Transparency in Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing thrives on fair and ethical partnerships, with transparency as its cornerstone. Clear communication ensures trust, mitigates risks, and enhances the overall effectiveness of affiliate programs. A lack of transparency can lead to misleading advertising, inaccurate tracking, unclear terms, and even fraud—issues that quickly erode confidence and credibility.

The primary objective of this guide is to safeguard all stakeholders—the affiliates' earnings and partnerships, advertisers' brands and customers, and the industry's overall reputation.

Establishing Clear Program Terms and Conditions

To maintain clarity and accountability, advertisers must communicate key details to affiliates. Terms and Conditions, typically outlined on the network or program sign-up page, serve as the foundation for defining the scope of affiliate activity. These terms should be comprehensive, explicit, and regularly updated.

While not all recommendations may apply universally, advertisers should consult their network or agency to ensure alignment with best practices.

Transparency Essentials for Affiliate Programs

1. Defining Commissionable Actions

Clearly articulating which actions qualify for commission—and which do not—is critical. Advertisers should explicitly define eligible transactions, excluded costs (e.g., GST and shipping), non-commissionable products, and reasons for order cancellations. Common exclusions include:

- > *Failed credit checks (non-retail)*
- > *Customer-initiated cancellations*
- > *Returned items*
- > *Out-of-stock products*
- > *Duplicate orders*
- > *Breaches of campaign terms and conditions*
- > *Use of exclusive coupon codes*

If certain products or transactions are ineligible for commission or redirect customers to non-tracked sites, advertisers must disclose this clearly on their sign-up page. Preventing potential leakage (e.g., online traffic converting offline) is essential. Strategies include suppressing prominent phone numbers for affiliate traffic or implementing call-tracking solutions to credit affiliates for phone sales.

For third-party payment systems like PayPal or Apple Pay, advertisers should ensure proper tracking is in place or restrict visibility for affiliate traffic. Directing affiliates to high-converting landing pages is also a recommended best practice.

Additionally, validation periods must be explicitly stated to enable affiliates to manage their campaigns effectively. Prompt validations encourage greater affiliate investment and program participation. Advertisers should not void orders for reasons not clearly outlined in their program terms.

Key details to include at sign-up:

- > *Commission rates (and any exclusions)*
- > *Cookie durations and tracking windows*
- > *Prohibited marketing practices*
- > *Whether click-less tracking (e.g., coupon codes) is enabled*
- > *Paid search policies*
- > *ITP-compliant tracking setup*

2. De-Duplication Policies

De-duplication impacts how orders are attributed within an affiliate program. Some programs de-duplicate between affiliate networks, while others extend this practice across broader digital marketing channels.

Advertisers must clarify:

- > *Which channels are included in de-duplication*
- > *The logic applied (e.g., "last click wins")*
- > *The implications of their attribution model*

Collaboration with networks and agencies ensures that de-duplication aligns with broader marketing strategies and maintains fair recognition of affiliate contributions.

Advertisers should avoid **de-duplicating against organic search or direct traffic**, as these are typically non-paid channels and often represent the last visit in a user's journey. Respecting the role of affiliates in driving customer decisions is paramount.

Best Practices:

- > *Display de-duplication policies within program terms*
- > *Notify affiliates of any changes with sufficient lead time*
- > *Consider the impact of de-duplication on conversion rates*
- > *Recognise the influence of affiliates on customer purchasing behaviour*

3. Managing Affiliate Types and Restrictions

Affiliate programs encompass a range of promotional methods, each requiring clear policies and guidelines. Advertisers must define and manage restrictions transparently to maintain program integrity.

Common affiliate types and key considerations:

- > **Paid Search:** Specify restricted search terms or URLs.
- > **Coupon Code Sites:** Provide clear guidelines on offer details and expiry dates.
- > **Incentive Sites:** Outline terms for cashback and loyalty programs, including untracked transactions..
- > **Retargeting Affiliates:** Define rules around retargeting and cookie hierarchy.
- > **Software Applications:** Clarify if consumer-downloaded software is permitted and how it interacts with tracking.
- > **Email Affiliates:** Indicate whether affiliates can send email campaigns to their databases.
- > **Mobile & Mobile Apps:** Ensure tracking is enabled for mobile transactions.
- > **Content Affiliates:** Provide brand guidelines to ensure proper representation of brand imagery and messaging.

As the industry evolves, advertisers should work with networks and agencies to evaluate emerging promotional methods and ensure compliance with industry standards.

4. Open and Transparent Communication

Clear, proactive communication is fundamental to successful affiliate relationships. Advertisers must be accessible to both affiliates and networks, fostering trust and collaboration.

Best Practices for Communication:

- > *Maintain open lines of communication with affiliates and networks.*
- > *Provide timely responses to queries and concerns.*
- > *Share program updates well in advance (minimum seven days' notice for significant changes).*
- > *Encourage dialogue on strategies, offers, and creative initiatives to enhance campaign performance.*

Affiliates are adaptable, but abrupt changes can negatively impact their efforts. Whenever possible, advertisers should provide ample notice for program modifications.

5. Mobile and App Tracking

Affiliate tracking must be seamlessly integrated into mobile sites and apps to ensure proper attribution. A failure to do so can result in untracked affiliate sales, discouraging promotion efforts and limiting program performance.

Implementing app tracking enhances user experience, facilitates a seamless customer journey, and ultimately boosts conversion rates. Advertisers should work with their networks to ensure mobile tracking capabilities align with industry best practices.

Conclusion

This guidance is designed to set affiliate programs up for success rather than impose restrictions. New advertisers should take time to understand the channel's dynamics, while experienced advertisers may need to reassess their programs in light of industry advancements.

By fostering trust, providing affiliates with visibility, and collaborating with networks and agencies, advertisers can maximise the impact of their affiliate programs. Upholding these best practices demonstrates a commitment to the affiliate channel and reinforces the credibility of the industry.

All IAB Affiliate Working Group member networks endorse these practices as cross-network best practices.

The IAB Australia Affiliate and Partnership Marketing Working Group comprises representatives from: Afterpay, Are Media, Cashrewards, Commission Factory, Future Publishing, GrowthOps, Impact, News Corp Australia, Partnerize, Rakuten, Silverbean.

Find out more about the Affiliate and Partnership Marketing Working Group on the [IAB Australia website](#).