



IAB EUROPE'S GUIDE TO NATIVE AD FORMATS

FOR RETAIL MEDIA NETWORKS

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Introduction

Traditional IAB standard ad formats struggle to integrate seamlessly with retail sites, resulting in the rise of custom ad formats by retailers and ad tech companies. Although these bespoke solutions enhance consumer engagement, they complicate the buying, managing, and reporting of retail media campaigns. The increase in non-standard ad specifications adds complexity and strains advertiser resources and hinders retailer revenues.

IAB Europe's Retail Media Committee explored the possibility of standardising ad formats fit for retail media but hasn't yet reached a consensus which would drive higher adoption and this remains a work in progress. Native Ad Units seem to fit the multiple use cases more appropriately and provide a solution for some of the issues faced. To that end, IAB Europe has developed the Guide to Native Ad Formats for Retail Media Networks. This guide serves as an essential resource for navigating the intricacies of native ad formats and maximising their potential within the on-site retail media landscape.

By using a standardised approach to ad formats such as the Native Ad API, retailers and advertisers can achieve a more cohesive and efficient approach to retail media, ensuring smoother integration, easier management, and more effective reporting.

Why it Matters to the Buy-Side

Agencies and brands are eager to test, learn, and innovate with new retail media ad formats. However, they often face challenges when these formats are overly complicated and require multiple rounds of development. Clients often lack the time, resources, or budgets needed for optimal media campaigns, and brand managers, focused on broader marketing plans, may allocate less attention to specific media buys. Further, new brands hesitate to experiment with custom ad formats and often stick to Sponsored Products which are more standardised.

"Native ad units are ad units that are integrated in the user's content experience and usually take the form of the content on the page." They were built with publishers in mind but with some minor tweaks they can fit retailers needs. [Here](#) is the IAB Native Ad Units description. On-site Retail Media has four main types of Ads: Sponsored Products, Sponsored Display, Display and Video. For the purposes of this guide we are focused on Sponsored Display and Display. These are the formats with static creative elements.

Section 1 - What are the Native Ad Specifications

The [Native Ads API](#) is a supplemental protocol that works alongside OpenRTB. When in play, it provides details about the ad creative without assembling the final asset. In the case of commerce or retail media, it relies on the bidder having some information about items in the Retailer's product feed and the creatives are rendered by the Retailer's stack.

The Native protocol is not about delivering a finished creative. It's about the bidder telling the site or app owner what they need to know to compile and render the creative. These are commonly content feeds, social feeds and product feeds.

When the retailer would like to retain the Native look and feel of their website, they can bring in the Native Ads API.

Section 2 - How do Native Ads Render on a Retailer Website

Retailer owned and operated sites and properties are geared to ecommerce sales and driving consumers to purchase in store, therefore they tend to merchandise their sites with visuals of products and promotional banners. This is in contrast to most publishers, which utilise a combination of images and text-based links to drive traffic to nested content. Native ads provide the opportunity to be more native to the page within this ecommerce environment. They can be placed within any location on a retailer site (see examples at the end of this Guide).

On-site Retail Media has four main types of Ads: Sponsored Products, Sponsored Display, Display and Video. For the purposes of this guide we are focused on Sponsored Display and Display. These are the formats with static creative elements.

Like all other current ad types (display and sponsored products), **retailers using a Server Side integration** receive an ad response containing the ad assets (images, text, url, etc). These retailers are responsible for painting these ads with the values within the ad response, therefore, the retailer team is responsible for developing the UI and code corresponding to the format.

Retailers utilising Client Side integration services would receive the same ad response as a ServerSide retailer, potentially with an added [SafeFrame](#) function nested in the delivery. This function will call back to the ad serving partner for the ad styling code and paint it into a designated <div> tag on the page. Like all their current integrated formats, these retailers would work with ad serving partner design teams, software engineers and technical solutions to develop these ads.

Section 3 - What Elements are Essential for Retail Media

To help standardise processes for retailers and support those with limited resources, we recommend using only the essential elements of the Native Ad Unit specifications for retail media to simplify buying and execution.

We suggest minimising the mandatory text fields to title and description only. Other text fields can remain optional, allowing retailers to use them as needed.

Additionally, alternative text for all images, including logo, are required to provide a precise description of image content for the visually impaired, all while remaining under 125 characters.

Retailers should prioritise their design and business objectives and only incorporate the necessary native data assets. We recommend focusing on the following elements:

- Title/Sub-Title (Note: this is the copy)
- Description (Note: this is the subtitle)
- Brand name
- Logo
- Color
- Call to action (CTA)
- Small print/legals
- Indicator flag (e.g., for age restricted products)
- Brand photos or assets

Note that for Sponsored Display, or creatives that include a SKU, the SKU information can be pulled from the retailer catalog or feed. Those include elements like: TIN/UPC/Product identifier, product image, price, product url, etc.

To identify the right landing page for the native ad, retailers have multiple options, including, but limited to:

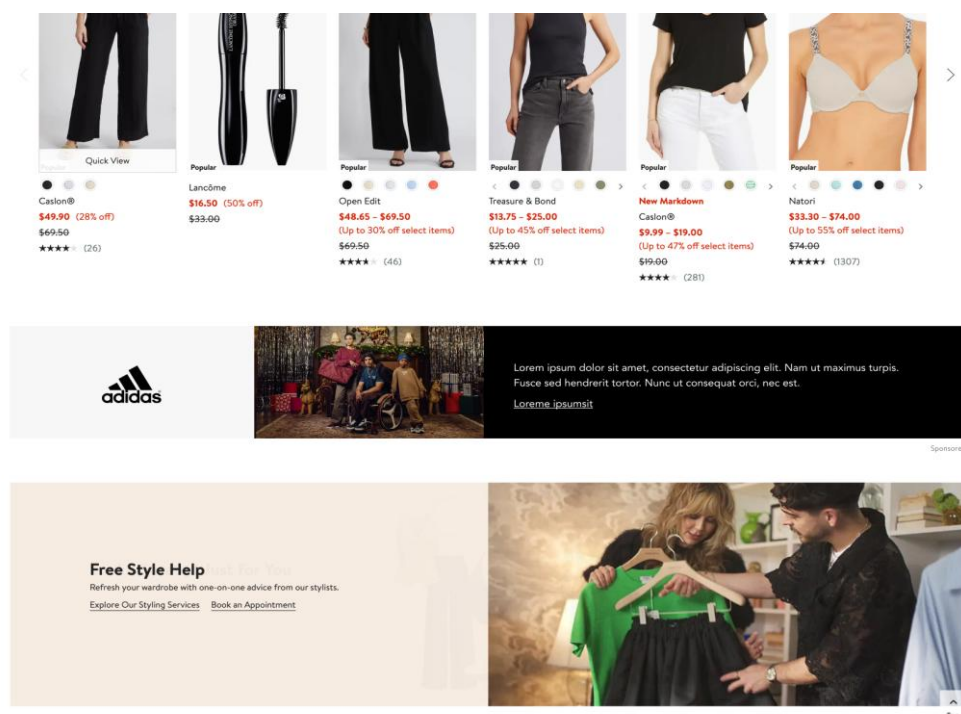
- Building a list of SKU's and using that to drive to the PDP (single SKU) or product list pages.
- Using an array to add multiple URLs to a creative so it can be specified by the advertiser.
- A specific category page (generally with the brand's products promoted on the category page).
- A brand shop or storefront (a custom-branded experience within the retailer's site).
- An external website (if allowed - some RMNs permit linking to brand-owned sites).

Section 4 - Examples

The following examples are for mock purposes only and do not reflect actual ad placements.

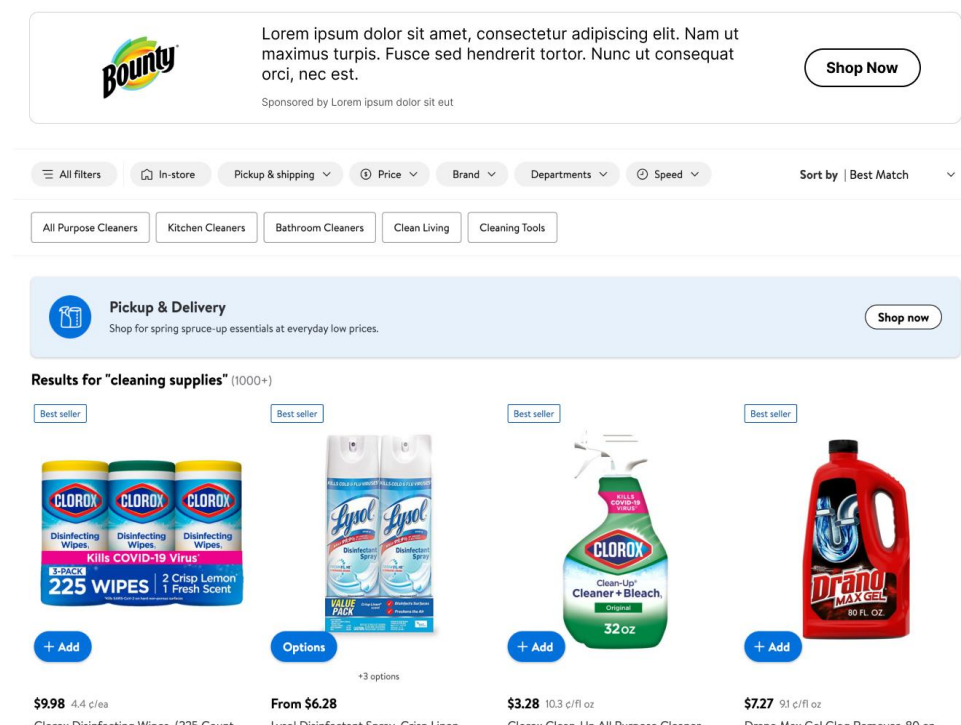
Homepage

Homepages can have full width, half or thirds layout configurations as well as product card carousels. Retailers can fit Native Ads according to the placement.



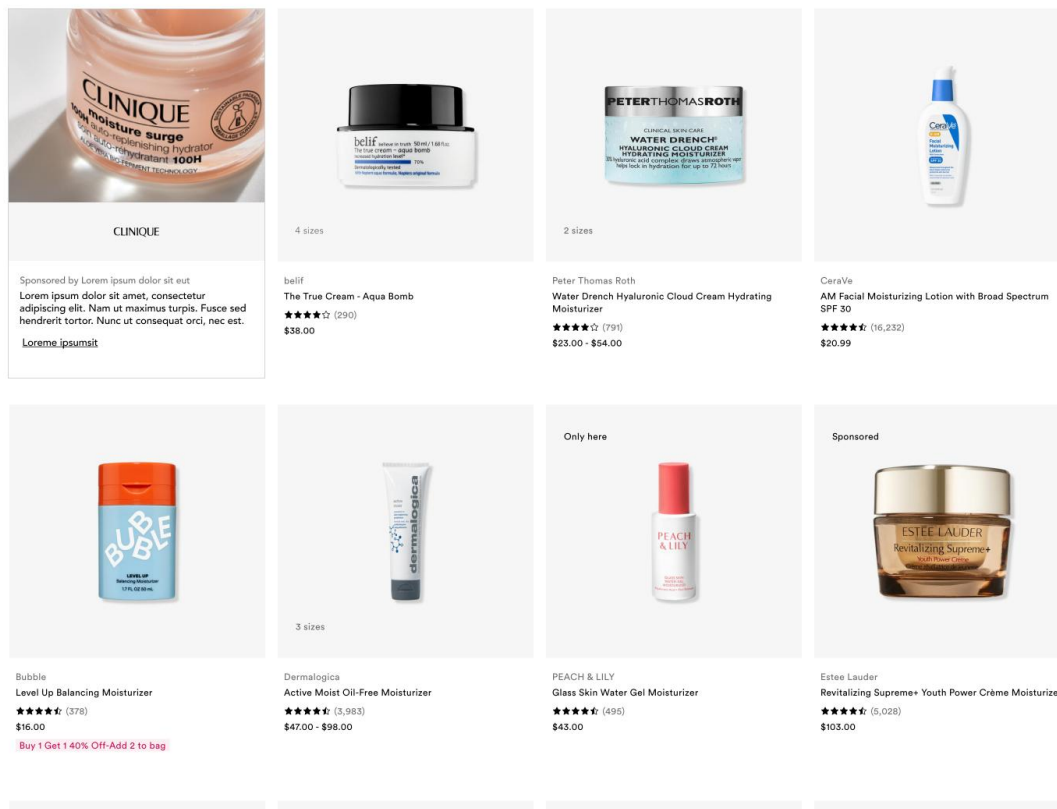
Top of page

Full width positions available for top, mid or bottom of category, merch or grid pages. This example utilizes a simple execution without the main image.



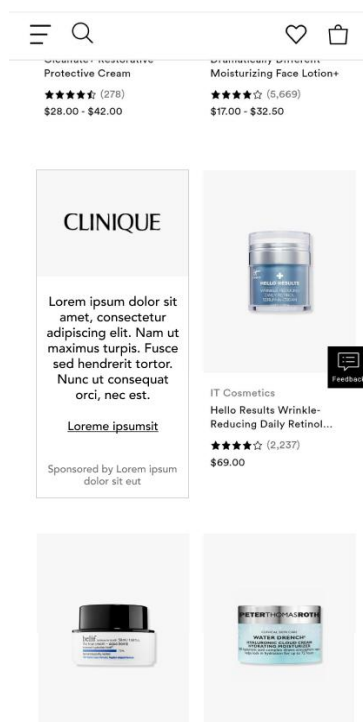
In-grid (Retailer 1)

In-grid placements will be favourable to retailers and brands alike due to mid-funnel tactics. Product cards have similar assets to native display and can be designed with the same UI/styles.



Mobile executions become more complex with some retailers using a 2-tile layout. These grids are narrower than the recommended minimum main image size. Images would rely on image asset aspect ratio.

Icon image only - 2 tile grid



Contributors

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