Reach Teams Up with Tech Industry to Solve "Coronavirus Blocklist" Challenge for News Sector

Reach, IBM and Xandr offer cutting edge technology to increase brand-safe advertising opportunities for UK businesses with AI-powered solution Mantis

30th April 2020 - A collaboration between the UK's largest commercial news publisher Reach, IBM and Xandr, AT&T's advanced advertising company, heralds a major breakthrough for the news industry, as publishers struggle to monetise their content despite huge demand from readers for high quality, trusted journalism.

Reach's Mantis is a semantic solution powered by IBM Watson's Natural Language Processing, that verifies whether news content is safe for brands. It is available through Xandr's advertising technology platform. Interested parties can contact Mantiswithxandr@xandr.com or their Xandr account representative for more information.

This technology means advertising can be directed to appear only alongside news stories, including those related to the Coronavirus, that have been categorised as neutral and positive. These include informative stories about homeschooling, cooking tips, how to stay fit at home or celebrating frontline workers such as those in the NHS.

The inventory is available across a collective of premium UK publishers, enabling brands to achieve national scale. Following testing, the Mantis tool is estimated to free up at least 70% of content – from national to regional brands – that is currently blocked by keyword targeting that blanketly prevent advertising from appearing alongside terms like "Coronavirus" and "Covid-19".

Benjamin Pheloung, General Manager for Mantis said, "There's no reason why a brand shouldn't want to have an advert placed next to a positive story, like one about sports and media personality Gary Lineker donating two months wages to the Red Cross to help fight Covid-19."

Tim Dutton, Client Executive for Media and Entertainment, IBM UK and Ireland, commented, "Safeguarding an organisation's brand is essential to maintaining consumer trust during this unprecedented time. We are pleased that through Mantis powered by IBM Watson, IBM will help deliver a Covid-19 ad blocking solution for safe news content across the UK."

Daniel Clayman, VP & Managing Director, Northern Europe at Xandr said: "Xandr operates in support of trusted newsrooms and premium advertisers around the globe and proactively seeks out sophisticated tools, like Mantis, for our clients to navigate disruptions to their business. Now more than ever, we're proud to put our platform to work for the news industry."

In a letter published last week the news industry asked advertisers to remove blocklists from trusted UK news brands to ensure they can continue to fund quality British journalism at a time of national crisis.

If the pandemic lasts for another three months and no action is taken, the UK news industry estimates that the total loss to the sector is expected to be in the region of £50 million.

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Notes to Editors:

About Mantis

Mantis is a brand safety and contextual product created by Reach. Mantis uses BM Watson (AI) to read a page and identify the topics it contains, and the tone it is written in. Because Mantis reads and understands the content, it is able to holistically identify content that is unsuitable for advertising, rather than relying on keywords which tend to lead to over-blocking. In practice, Mantis can distinguish between a 'knife attack' and an 'attack on goal' or 'nude photos' and 'nude lipstick.'

About IBM

IBM teamed up with Reach in October 2019 to launch Mantis, a new brand safety platform underpinned by IBM Watson Natural Language Understanding and Watson Visual Recognition on the IBM Cloud. The platform uses AI and machine learning to check whether content is appropriate for advertising and reducing unnecessary blacklisting. Today a significant proportion of news content alone is blacklisted to advertisers, reducing revenue for publishers and reducing reach within premium content for brands, a problem that stems from the less intuitive and less sophisticated solutions currently on the market. By sitting on the IBM cloud, Mantis will enable Reach to develop secure brand safety solutions at scale supporting IBM and Reach's goal of rolling out across the globe.

About Reach Plc

Reach plc is the UK's largest commercial news publisher, with over 50 national and regional news brands including the Mirror, Express, Star, OK!, New!, Daily Record, Manchester Evening News, Liverpool Echo, MyLondon, BelfastLive and WalesOnline. Each month Reach sells over 44.5 million newspapers around the country, and reaches a print and digital audience of over 40 million and has a growing network of over 50 websites.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Mantis?

Mantis is an innovative brand safety and semantic tool. The application uses natural language learning techniques and AI powered by IBM Watson to read a page and identify the topics it contains, and the tone it is written in. Because Mantis reads and understands the content, it is able to holistically identify content that is unsuitable for advertising, rather than relying on keywords which tend to lead to over-blocking. In practice, Mantis can distinguish between a 'knife attack' and an 'attack on goal' or 'nude photos' and 'nude lipstick.'

2. Who created Mantis?

Mantis has been created by Reach plc, the UK's largest commercial news publisher.

3. What is the technology behind IBM Watson for Mantis?

Mantis is underpinned by IBM Watson Natural Language Understanding and Watson Visual Recognition on the IBM Cloud. The platform uses AI and machine learning to check whether content is appropriate for advertising and reducing unnecessary blacklisting.

4. How extensive was the testing for Mantis and what is its success rate?

The Mantis team conducted thorough testing with a range of editorial content containing Coronavirus and Covid-19 related stories across media outlets from all news publishers and Mantis reduced ad blocking between 70-75%.

5. Who does Xandr work with?

Xandr is AT&T's advanced advertising company, operating in support of trusted newsrooms and premium advertisers around the globe. Our selling platform, Xandr Monetize, enables publishers and media companies to maximize yield, and our buying platform, Xandr Invest, enables advertisers and agencies to harness data and machine learning to deliver intelligent and customised campaigns. The process is almost instantaneous. From here Xandr aggregates the inventory to make it available as a package.

6. How does Xandr filter the content for its clients?

Xandr passes news URLs through the Mantis filter, which is powered by IBM Watson AI that categorises the news stories as neutral or positive, deeming it safe for adverts to appear alongside. Mantis then returns all of the brand-safe URLs as per its brand safety model. From here, Xandr aggregates the inventory to make it available to buyers as a package.

7. How do advertisers engage with Xandr's platform to leverage the Mantis filter?

The Mantis filter is applied to exchange curated deals (ECDs) conducted through Xandr's Supply-side Platform (SSP), Xandr Monetize. In an exchange curated deal, Xandr aggregates targetable inventory across various supply sources (publishers) via a single Deal ID. Exchange curated deals solve key buyer challenges by seamlessly aggregating highly desired, targetable supply. These deals make it easy for buyers to access the inventory they want. Advertisers can participate using their choice of Demand-side Platform (DSP).

8. What types of stories are categorised as 'Safe' and ''Unsafe'?

News stories like "Clap for the NHS", articles about cancelled events, content about deliveries all pass the Mantis test, fitness stories and home-schooling articles are just some of the examples. All stories and content about the death toll of and death resulting from COVID-19.

9. What is Mantis' value to advertisers during the COVID-19 crisis?

Even in the midst of a crisis, brands should be able to feel confident that they can place their advertising within the context of neutral or positive news stories, like one about sports and media personality Gary Lineker donating two months wages to the Red Cross to help fight Covid-19. The continued flow of advertising and resulting revenue for publishers is critical to the health and stability of trusted news sources around the globe.

10. Where is Mantis currently available?

Xandr are currently offering the service to clients based in the UK only. The technology has the potential to be used by other buyers and sellers in global markets at some point in the future.

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https://uk.newsroom.ibm.com/2020-04-30-Reach-Teams-Up-with-Tech-Industry-to-Solve-Coronavirus-Blocklist-Challenge-for-News-Sector