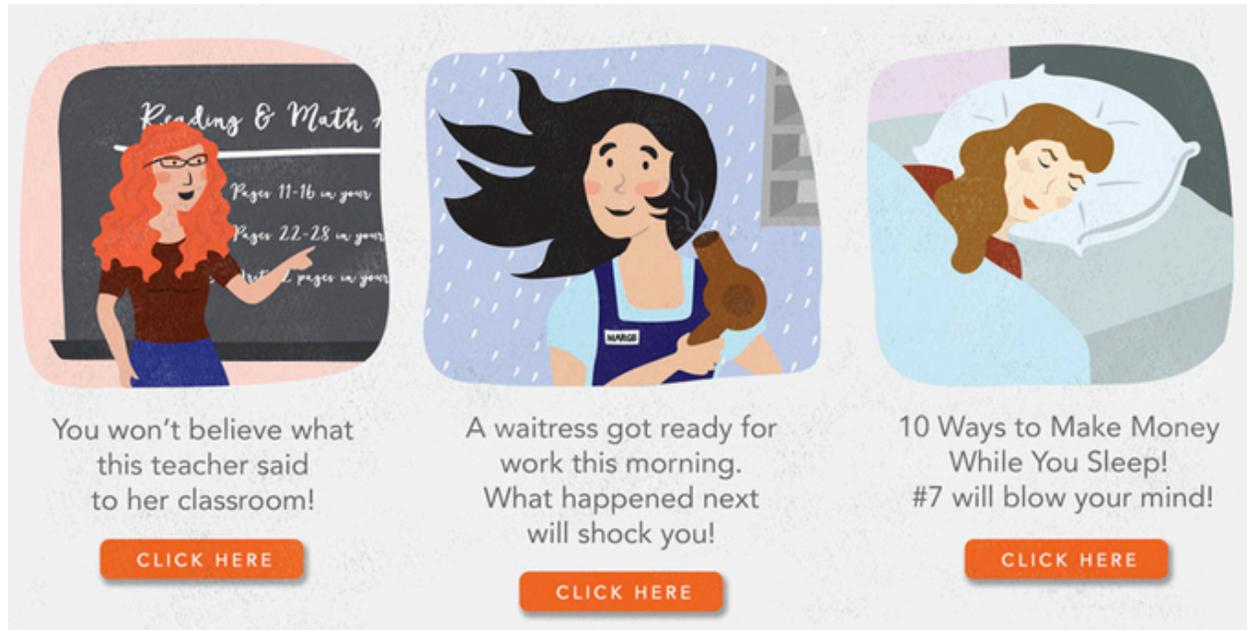


## What is clickbait?



If you've spent any time on the Internet, you've likely seen articles and images with headlines like the examples above. They're just a small sampling of what's known as clickbait.

**Clickbait** is a sensationalized headline that encourages you to click a link to an article, image, or video. Instead of presenting objective facts, clickbait headlines often appeal to your **emotions and curiosity**. Once you click, the website hosting the link earns revenue from advertisers, but the actual content is usually of questionable quality and accuracy. Websites use clickbait to draw in as many clicks as possible, thus increasing their ad revenue.

While sensational headlines and content have been used since the 19th century, they've become widespread in the digital world. Although it's

based on an old idea, clickbait still serves the same purpose as its ancestor: to get your attention by whatever means necessary.

### **Why is clickbait an issue?**

When websites use clickbait, they typically value getting clicks over producing quality information. This means they do not care if they waste your time with mediocre content.

Let's take a look at the image below. The headline is somewhat vague, but it reads as if a terrible secret has kept Joe Pesci out of the public eye. However, after doing some quick research, we discovered that he simply retired in 1999 to enjoy life away from acting. While this type of journalism is annoying, it's usually harmless.



The Real Reason We Don't Hear From Joe Pesci Anymore  
Looper.com

However, clickbait can be harmful when it's used along with the creation of fake news. The outrageous fake headlines stoke the emotions of readers, who then spread the content on social media. You may wonder what allows clickbait and fake news to keep spreading, despite their poor quality and accuracy. Unfortunately, studies have shown that 6 out of 10 people share headlines on social media without reading the actual article.

## **Where do you find clickbait?**

You can find it almost anywhere on the Internet, which makes it difficult to avoid. Clickbait headlines are common in places like social media and blogs, while many reputable sites like weather reports and news agencies offer ad space to clickbait content. This means you'll have to remain careful before you click a link, even when you're on a quality website.

## **How can I recognize it?**

You can usually spot clickbait through an outrageous headline or image, but it isn't always this easy. Sometimes it's difficult to spot the difference between clickbait and a legitimate headline. After all, every news story wants your attention.

There are a few common elements used in clickbait content, such as vague headlines and images that let your imagination run wild. Clickbait also uses shock and outrage to grab your attention, as well as vague numbered lists, like **17 Facts You Won't Believe Are True**. Many links use a combination of these elements to lure you into clicking.

Here's a simple way to tell if you're looking at a clickbait article: If the headline tells you how to feel instead of letting you come up with your own reaction, it's probably clickbait.

## **What is targeted advertising?**

Advertising is everywhere online, but we've gotten pretty good at ignoring it. To win back our attention, advertisers have adapted to our digital viewing habits by remembering what we read and buy online, then using this information to sell us things they think we might like. While it may sound strange, this practice, called targeted advertising, has become very common.

**Targeted advertising** is a form of online advertising that focuses on the specific traits, interests, and preferences of a consumer. Advertisers discover this information by **tracking your activity** on the Internet.

### **How does it work?**

Here's one of the most common methods: Let's say you go to Amazon to look for a new Paul McCartney CD. In order to keep track of your visit, Amazon creates a file called a **cookie** on your computer. Later, when you're reading an article on Slate, automated advertisements read this cookie and generate ads for items related to your Amazon visit, like other Paul McCartney albums or a Beatles T-shirt.

The good thing about targeted ads is that you'll see ads for products you actually want. However, this system isn't perfect. Even if you only visit a page once, you may see ads for that particular product for quite some time. For instance, you may keep getting ads for maternity wear long after you've given birth.

Aside from cookies, advertisers also learn about you in other ways, like checking your **search engine history** and finding your **personal information** on social media.

### **Isn't this an invasion of my privacy?**

Targeted advertising could be seen as an **invasion of privacy**. However, remember that all of the information you submit to the Internet can be tracked, whether it be search engine requests, social media updates, or the websites you visit. And if it can be tracked, this information may return to you in the form of a targeted ad.

The more advertisers know about you, the more they assume about your buying habits. Age, gender, income, relationship status: Advertisers will take whatever they can get if it means they could sell you something. For instance, the Facebook profile below contains biographical information that advertisers would love to know. According to the profile, this user is a young, art school-educated woman who lives in a

big city. Based solely on this information, advertisers could send her numerous targeted ads that may appeal to her.

### **Can these ads follow me across different devices?**

Yes. If you're shopping for work boots on your laptop, you can get targeted ads for work boots on your smartphone, even though you never browsed for boots on the device. Advertisers can now guess who you are by analyzing your location, browsing habits, and the types of sites you sign in to, like Facebook or Google. And the crazy part? Their guesses are surprisingly accurate!

The advertisers that collect and use this data claim to not keep sensitive personal information on file, but it's difficult to figure out exactly what these **big-data advertisers** know. Unfortunately, this type of data collection is becoming the norm and currently there are no regulations against it, meaning it will likely be around for years. Thankfully, there are a few things you can do to fight back against the ads.

### **How can I stop these ads?**

First, a good rule of thumb for browsing online: *Assume that nothing you do online is private.*

Next, if you simply want to stop seeing ads, download an **ad blocker** for your web browser, which should get rid of most of them. To prevent advertisers from tracking your information altogether, you have a few options:

- Go to the **Privacy** settings of your web browser, then delete your cookies and ask websites not to track you.
- Visit an **opt-out site** like *About Ads* and request that participating ad agencies stop tracking your information. While it will not completely eliminate targeted ads, it will significantly reduce them.

- **Reduce** the amount of information you share on social media, giving advertisers less to learn about you.

Also, all web browsers have a **private browsing** mode that doesn't record your history or cookies. However, this mode will not prevent targeted ads, as advertisers can still track you in other ways, like your search engine history and social media information.

Online ads aren't going away anytime soon, and targeted advertising is proof that advertisements have adapted to the changing tastes and habits of consumers. Now that you understand how advertisers learn about you and your online activity, targeted ads should no longer surprise you.