

Google Affiliate Network Plugin User Manual

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September 20, 2011

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Introduction

I wrote this plugin to display ads from the Google Affiliate Network on Deepwoods Software's WordPress powered website. This plugin uses a database of ads to display. The ads are displayed in rotation, using the simple method of counting ad impressions and giving priority to the advertisers with the least impressions and display ads with the least impressions first that are expiring soonest. As ads and advertisers are displayed,

their impression counts are incremented, which moves them down the list¹. This means that all ads are displayed fairly, with preference given to new ads and to ads which are expiring soonest². After using “in house” for a while, I have made this plugin available to other WordPress users who also using the Google Affiliate Network as a source of advertising revenue.

Sustainable Plugin Development - and Your Privacy

Google Affiliate Network is a participant in the Sustainable Plugins Sponsorship Network (SPSN) - <http://pluginsponsors.com/>. The SPSN model offers modest sponsorships to plugin authors in return for a small amount of screen real estate on plugin options pages. The SPSN sponsor messages can be switched altogether: just visit the Config page.

IMPORTANT PRIVACY INFORMATION: NO INDIVIDUALLY IDENTIFIABLE DETAILS OF ANY KIND, REGARDING EITHER YOU OR YOUR SITE, will be collected or shared as a result of displaying Sustainable Plugins Sponsorship Network (SPSN) sponsor messages. Sponsors receive only aggregate reports of impressions on a worldwide per-plugin basis, NOT on impressions or on any other activity at any individual site which happens to be using a plugin.

There is a configuration option to disable PluginSponsor messages, see the section on configuring for details about this option.

Installation

Installation is just a matter of installing from the new plugin page. Once installed and activated, the plugin is ready to start displaying affiliate ads.

Configuring

There are two configuration options: one for automatically deleting expired ads and one to disable PluginSponsor messages. The option to automatically delete expired ads is on by default and the option to disable PluginSponsor messages is off by default. While it is possible to disable automatically deleting expired ads it is not recommended. If PluginSponsor messages are turned off, a PayPal donate message is displayed instead.

If you have upgraded from an older version of the plugin, the configure page will display a button to upgrade the database to the new version.

Managing your ad database

Managing your ads is done from the main GAN database page, shown in Figure 1. The advertiser, link id, link name, image size, start date, end date, and enabled flag are

¹To the back of the list once the impression counts reach equilibrium, when the impression counts are all the same.

²Expired ads are not displayed and a daily cron job deletes them.

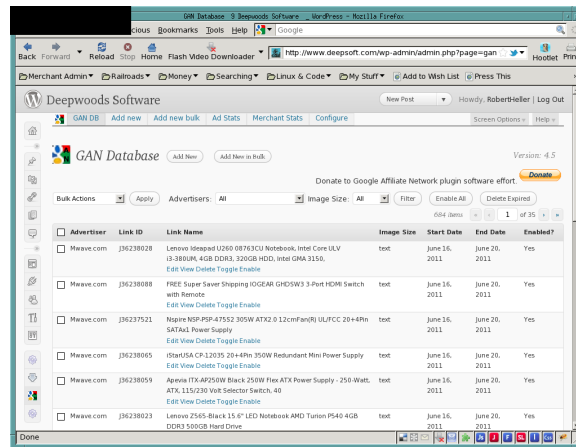


Figure 1: GAN Database Admin Page

displayed in this table. Ads are sorted by increasing end date. It is possible to filter the displayed ad by advertiser and/or ad size. There is a button to enable all ads and to delete ads that have expired. Ads can be deleted or have their enable flag toggled in bulk. Ads can be individually edited, viewed, deleted or have their enable flags toggled.

Inserting Ads

In order to display ads, you need to have some ads in your database. There are two ways to insert ads: manually, one by one or in bulk from a TSV (Tab Separated Value) file. Manual insertion is done on the *Add new* admin page and bulk insertion is done on the *Add new bulk* admin page.

Add new admin page (manual insertion)

This page, shown in Figure 2, has a form for adding (and editing and viewing) a single ad. Generally, this page is not usually used, see Section for adding ads in bulk. The fields³ include:

Advertiser: This is the advertiser's name.

Link ID: This is the (unique) Link Id code. This ID value is supplied by Google and uniquely identifies the ad. Link IDs must be unique and are prefixed by an uppercase "J".

Link Name: This is the name of the link. It is used as the anchor text for text ads.

Merchandising Text: This is some ad copy for the link and is displayed with the ad link.

³These fields correspond to the column headings used in the files sent as part of your E-Mailed Link Subscriptions.

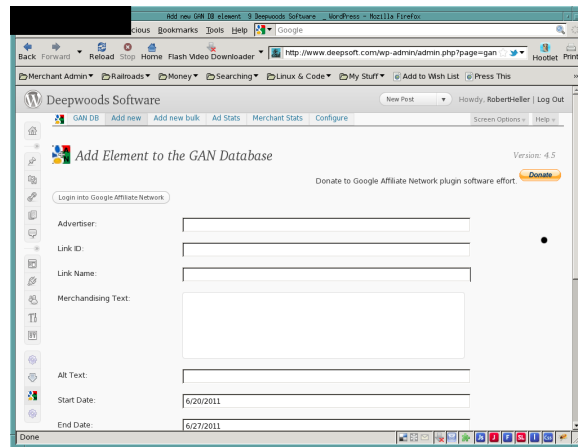


Figure 2: GAN Manual Add Page

Alt Text: This is the alternative text for image ads.

Start Date: This is the starting date, in the format yyyy-mm-dd or m/d/yyyy.

End Date: This is the ending date, in the format yyyy-mm-dd or m/d/yyyy. For ads with no ending date use a date far into the future, like 2037-12-31.

Clickserver Link: This is the tracking URL for the ad.

ImageURL: This is the URL of the ad image for image ads.

ImageHeight: This is the height of the image (0 for text ads).

ImageWidth: This is the width of the image (0 for text ads).

LinkURL: This is the Link URL. This is the URL of the actual banner image.

PromoType: This is the type of promotion.

MerchantID: This is the (unique) merchant id. This value is supplied by Google and is prefixed by an uppercase "K".

enabled? This indicates if the ad is enabled or not.

Add new bulk admin page (bulk insertion)

This page, shown in Figure 3, uploads a TSV file of ads previously downloaded from your Google Affiliate Network management page. You get this file by visiting your Google Affiliate Network management page and clicking the Links tab (see figure 4). On this page you can select the sorts of ads you would like by selecting one or more of your approved advertisers and selecting the type of ads (text and/or banner), and other criteria such as size, etc. It is then possible to export these ads as a TSV file, using

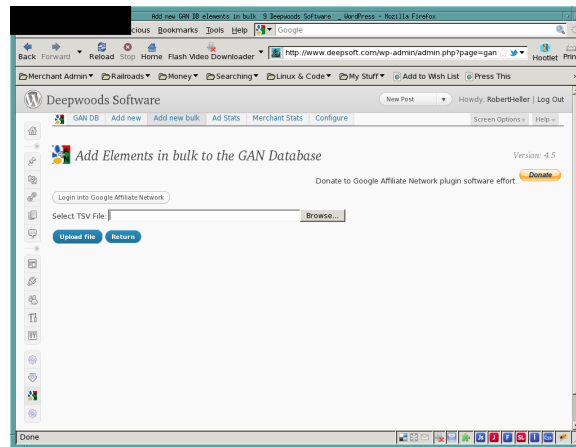


Figure 3: GAN Bulk Add Page

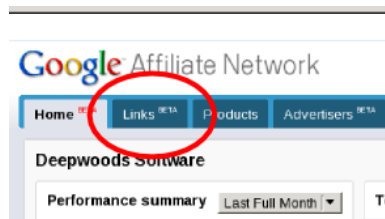


Figure 4: GAN Links Tab

the Export As button and selecting “Tab Separated Values” option (see figure 5), which can then be downloaded. This same file can in turn be uploaded to the GAN plugin and the ads in this file will be added to your ad database.

Editing Ads

When displaying the data on the main admin page, links are provided to edit, delete, or toggle the enabled flag for each ad. The ads are displayed ordered by expiration date, with the soonest to expire displayed first. It is possible to select only a single merchant’s ads to be displayed and/or a single size of ad or only text ads.

Ad Subscriptions

A Tcl script is included to process E-Mailed Ad Subscriptions and insert them into the database. This requires the ability to receive E-Mail on the server running the database server and requires that Tcl and the MySQLtcl package be installed as well as the use of procmail as a mail delivery agent.



Figure 5: GAN Export Links As

Showing Ads

There are two ways to show ads on your pages and/or posts. You can use one of the two widgets (GAN Image Widget or GAN Widget) or one of the two shortcodes (GAN_Text or GAN_Image). The widgets of course need to go into a 'sidebar' that supports widgets. The shortcodes can go into any post or page.

GAN Widget

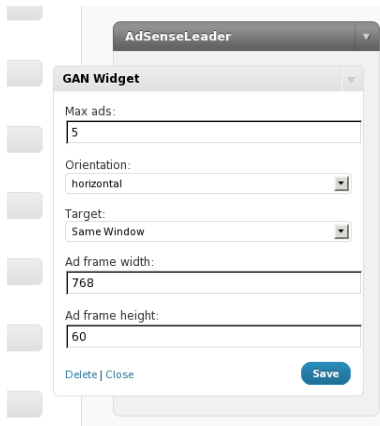


Figure 6: GAN Widget

This widget (see Figure 6) shows text ads in a “sidebar” that supports widgets. The GAN Widget has five parameters:

Max ads: The maximum number of ads to display in this ad unit.

Orientation: The orientation of the ads. Horizontal means the ads are arranged side by side like one row of a table and vertical means the ads are arranged in a vertical list. Typically the horizontal orientation is suitable for a wide but short ad frame and the vertical orientation is suitable for sky scrapper type ad unit.

Target: The link target to use. Can be either Same Window or New Window or Tab.

Ad frame width: The width of the ad frame. A value of zero will cause the frame to use all of the available space.

Ad frame height: The height of the ad frame.

GAN Image Widget

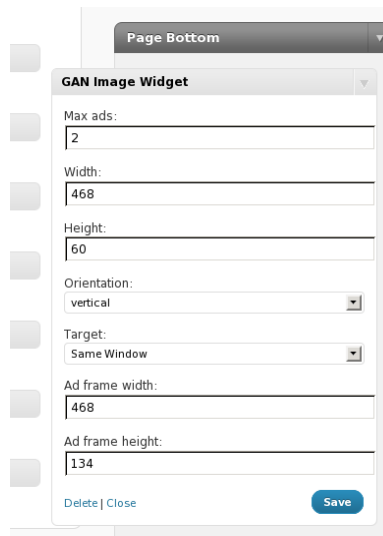
The image shows a configuration window for a 'GAN Image Widget'. The window has a title bar 'Page Bottom' and a subtitle 'GAN Image Widget'. It contains several input fields and dropdown menus. The 'Max ads' field is set to '2'. The 'Width' field is set to '468'. The 'Height' field is set to '60'. The 'Orientation' dropdown is set to 'vertical'. The 'Target' dropdown is set to 'Same Window'. The 'Ad frame width' field is set to '468'. The 'Ad frame height' field is set to '134'. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Delete | Close' and 'Save'.

Figure 7: GAN Image Widget

This widget (see Figure 7) shows image (banner) ads in a “sidebar” that supports widgets. Any given widget instance (ad unit) can only show one size of banner ad.

The GAN Image Widget has seven parameters:

Max ads: The maximum number of ads to display in this ad unit.

Width: The image width of the image ads.

Height: The image height of the image ads.

Orientation: The orientation of the ads. Horizontal means the ads are arranged side by side like one row of a table and vertical means the ads are arranged in a vertical list. Typically the horizontal orientation is suitable for a wide but short ad frame and the vertical orientation is suitable for sky scrapper type ad unit.

Target: The link target to use. Can be either Same Window or New Window or Tab.

Ad frame width: The width of the ad frame. A value of zero will cause the frame to use all of the available space.

Ad frame height: The height of the ad frame.

GAN_Text shortcode

This shortcode inserts a text ad unit into a page or post.

The GAN_Text shortcode has same five parameters as the GAN Widget:

maxads An integer, with the default being 4. The maximum number of ads to display in this ad unit.

orientation The orientation of the ads, one of “vertical” (the default) or “horizontal”. Horizontal means the ads are arranged side by side like one row of a table and vertical means the ads are arranged in a vertical list. Typically the horizontal orientation is suitable for a wide but short ad frame and the vertical orientation is suitable for sky scrapper type ad unit.

target The link target to use, one of “same” (the default) or “new”.

ifwidth The width of the ad frame. A value of zero will cause the frame to use all of the available space.

ifheight The height of the ad frame.

Here is an example – 5 text ads arranged horizontally in a 798x70 frame:

```
[GAN_Text maxads=5 orientation='horizontal' ifwidth=798 ifheight=70]
```

GAN_Image shortcode

This shortcode inserts an image (banner) ad unit into a page or post. Like the GAN Image Widget, all of the ads displayed are of the same size.

The GAN_Image shortcode has same seven parameters as the GAN Image Widget:

maxads An integer, with the default being 4. The maximum number of ads to display in this ad unit.

orientation The orientation of the ads, one of “vertical” (the default) or “horizontal”. Horizontal means the ads are arranged side by side like one row of a table and vertical means the ads are arranged in a vertical list. Typically the horizontal orientation is suitable for a wide but short ad frame and the vertical orientation is suitable for sky scrapper type ad unit.

target The link target to use, one of “same” (the default) or “new”.

width The image width of the image ads. The default is 120.

height The image height of the image ads. The default is 60.

ifwidth The width of the ad frame. A value of zero will cause the frame to use all of the available space.

ifheight The height of the ad frame.

Here is an example – 2 468x60 banners arranged vertically in a 468x126 frame:

```
[GAN_Image maxads=2 orientation='vertical' ifwidth=468 ifheight=126 width=468 height=60]
```


Using the ad unit insertion media button

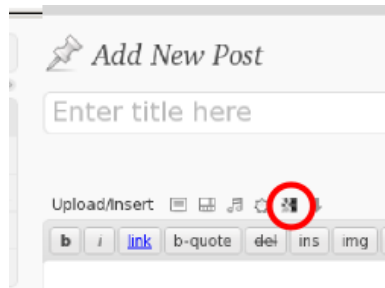


Figure 8: GAN Insert Ad Unit Media button

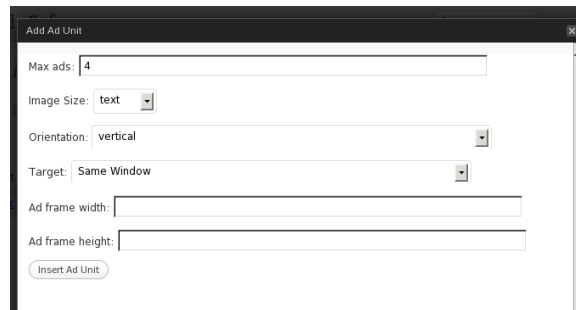


Figure 9: GAN Insert Ad Unit Dialog Box

As of version 4.3, a “media button”, shown in Figure 8, is available to aid in the insertion of the ad unit short codes into pages and posts. This button opens a dialog window, shown in Figure 9, where the parameters can be easily selected to create a short code that will insert an ad unit into the current page or post. You can select the maximum number of ads to display in this ad unit, the size or type of ad, the orientation of the ads within the ad unit and the size of the ad frame. When you click on the insert ad button, the proper short code is generated and inserted into your page or post.

The ad rotation algorithm

The ad rotation algorithm uses the impression count and the end date to fairly display ads. Impression counts are stored for each ad and each merchant. When an ad from a given merchant is displayed, that merchant’s impression count is incremented. And when a given ad is displayed, its impression count is incremented. These counts are used like this:

The ad display loop works like this:

First the merchant with the lowest impression count that has an ad of the desired size is selected. Then the ad from that merchant with the lowest impression count,

that also has the soonest end date is selected (expired ads are not shown). The HTML code for the ad is generated, then the impression count for the ad and the merchant are incremented. Then the process is repeated. This means that every merchant gets a shot and every ad of every merchant also gets a shot.

Some things to note:

If a merchant has a lot of ads, each of these ads will be displayed fewer times than the ads of a merchant with a smaller number of ads. Each merchant will get the same number of total impressions and these impressions will be shared across all of the merchant's ads. Ads that will expire sooner will get "preferred" exposure and will tend to get more impressions, at least until they expire. Newly added merchants and ads will also get "preferred" exposure, since they will be starting with a impression counts of zero. But over time, these "new" merchants and ads will catch up with the older merchants and ads. It is possible to zero the impression counts of both merchants and ads and this will "level" the playing field.

Statistics

Both ad and merchant statistics are available for display and download as CSV files. The statistics are ordered from fewest impressions to most impressions. A summary of the statistics is also displayed on the dashboard. Ad statistics can be filtered by advertiser and/or by size.

In the statistics display is the option to zero all, a select group, or individual ads or merchants. These impression counts are used by the ad rotation algorithm.