

Google Affiliate Network Plugin User Manual (V6)

Robert Heller

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Contents

Introduction	2
Installation	2
Configuring	2
Managing your link ad database	3
Inserting Link Ads	4
Add new link ad admin page (manual link insertion)	4
Add new links in bulk admin page (bulk link insertion)	5
Editing Ads	5
Link Subscriptions	6
Managing your product ad database	6
Inserting Products	6
Add new Product admin page (manual product insertion)	7
Add new products in bulk admin page (bulk product insertion)	8
Showing Ads	9
GAN Widget	9
GAN Image Widget	10
GAN Product Widget	11
GAN_Text shortcode	13
GAN_Image shortcode	14
GAN_Product shortcode	15
Using the GAN ad unit insertion media button	16
The ad rotation algorithm	16
Statistics	17

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.

There are two type of ads: Link Ads, which are links to advertisers' web pages and Product Ads, which are links to product buy pages. Both kinds of ad units are supported by the current version of this plug in. The ad information is different and the ads are kept in separate database that are managed separately.

This manual has been updated for version 6.0 of the plugin, which is a major re-write of the code.

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 add additional CSS to fine tune how the ad blocks look. The option to automatically delete expired ads is on by default. While it is possible to disable automatically deleting expired ads it is not recommended. The additional CSS section can be used to adjust the look of ad blocks. For the outer iframe, and for img and p tags in the ad units, the class attribute is set to GANleader for horizontal ad units and GANright for vertical ad units. Within the ad unit (link ads), there is a ul tag, whose id attribute is set to GANleader for horizontal ad units and GANright for vertical ad units. You can use these CSS selectors:

iframe.GANleader For the outer iframe of horizontal ad units.

img.GANleader For the product images of horizontal product ad units.

p.GANleader For the product description of horizontal product ad units.

ul#GANleader For the list of link ads in horizontal ad units.

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.

iframe.GANright For the outer iframe of vertical ad units.

img.GANright For the product images of vertical product ad units.

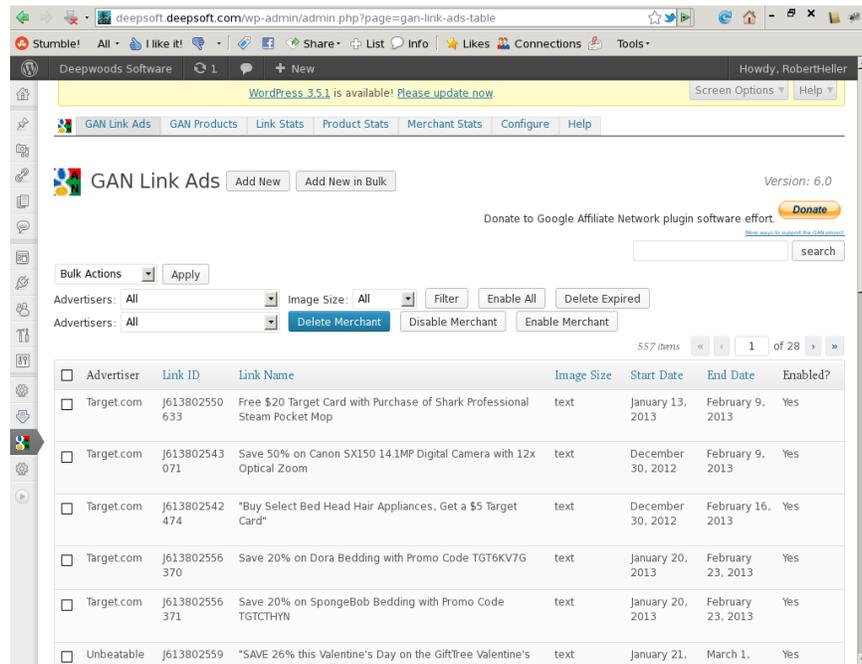
p.GANright For the product description of vertical product ad units.

ul#GANright For the list of link ads in vertical ad units.

The file, GAN.css in the css directory, is the default stylesheet.

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 link ad database



The screenshot shows the GAN Link Ads Admin Page. At the top, there are navigation tabs: GAN Link Ads, GAN Products, Link Stats, Product Stats, Merchant Stats, Configure, and Help. Below the tabs, there are buttons for 'Add New' and 'Add New in Bulk', and a 'Version: 6.0' indicator. A 'Donate' button is also present. The main content area features a search bar and a table of ad units. The table has columns for Advertiser, Link ID, Link Name, Image Size, Start Date, End Date, and Enabled?. The table contains several rows of ad units, including one from Target.com for a Shark Professional Steam Pocket Mop and another for a Canon SX150 14.1MP Digital Camera.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Advertiser	Link ID	Link Name	Image Size	Start Date	End Date	Enabled?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target.com	J613802550633	Free \$20 Target Card with Purchase of Shark Professional Steam Pocket Mop	text	January 13, 2013	February 9, 2013	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target.com	J613802543071	Save 50% on Canon SX150 14.1MP Digital Camera with 12x Optical Zoom	text	December 30, 2012	February 9, 2013	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target.com	J613802542474	"Buy Select Bed Head Hair Appliances, Get a \$5 Target Card"	text	December 30, 2012	February 16, 2013	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target.com	J613802556370	Save 20% on Dora Bedding with Promo Code TGT6KV7G	text	January 20, 2013	February 23, 2013	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Target.com	J613802556371	Save 20% on SpongeBob Bedding with Promo Code TGTCTHYN	text	January 20, 2013	February 23, 2013	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unbeatable	J613802559553	"SAVE 26% this Valentine's Day on the GiftFree Valentine's	text	January 21, 2013	March 1, 2013	Yes

Figure 1: GAN Link Ads Admin Page

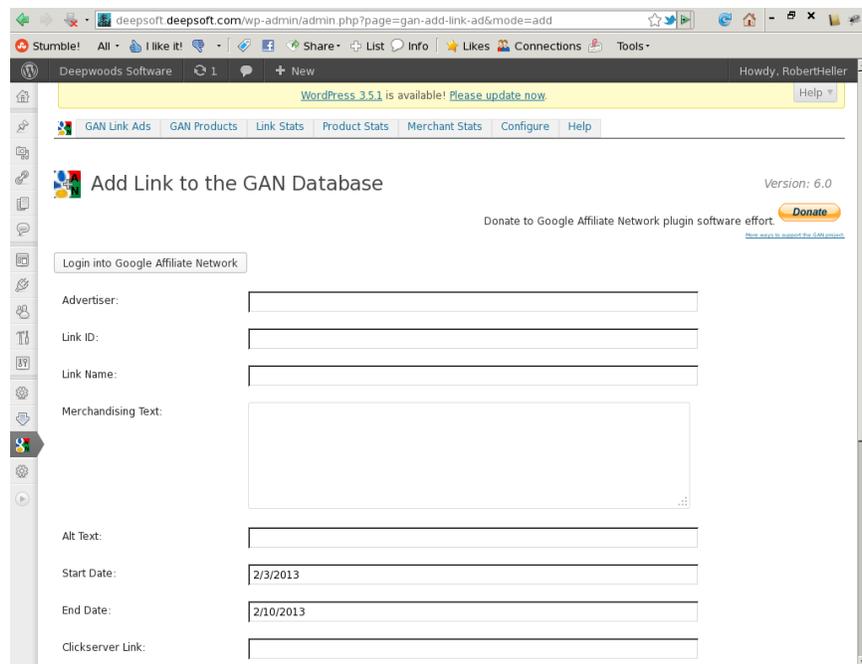
Managing your ads is done from the GAN Link Ads page, shown in Figure 1. The advertiser, link id, link name, image size, start date, end date, and enabled flag are displayed in this table. Ads are initially sorted by increasing end date, by default, but can also be sorted by Link ID, Link Name, Image Size, or Start Date. It is possible to filter the displayed ad by advertiser and/or ad size. You can also search by Link Name. 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. You can also delete, disable, and enable by merchant.

Inserting Link 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) or CSV (Comma Separated Value) file. Manual insertion is done on the *Add new (Link)* admin page and bulk insertion is done on the *Add new (links in) bulk* admin page.

Add new link ad admin page (manual link insertion)



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Add Link to the GAN Database' admin page. The page has a navigation menu with 'GAN Link Ads', 'GAN Products', 'Link Stats', 'Product Stats', 'Merchant Stats', 'Configure', and 'Help'. The main content area includes a 'Login into Google Affiliate Network' button, a 'Donate' button, and a form with the following fields: Advertiser, Link ID, Link Name, Merchandising Text, Alt Text, Start Date (2/3/2013), End Date (2/10/2013), and Clickserver Link.

Figure 2: GAN Manual Add Link Ad Page

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.

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

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.

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 page.

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 whether the ad is enabled or not.

Add new links in bulk admin page (bulk link insertion)

This page, shown in Figure 3, uploads a TSV or CSV 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 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. 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.

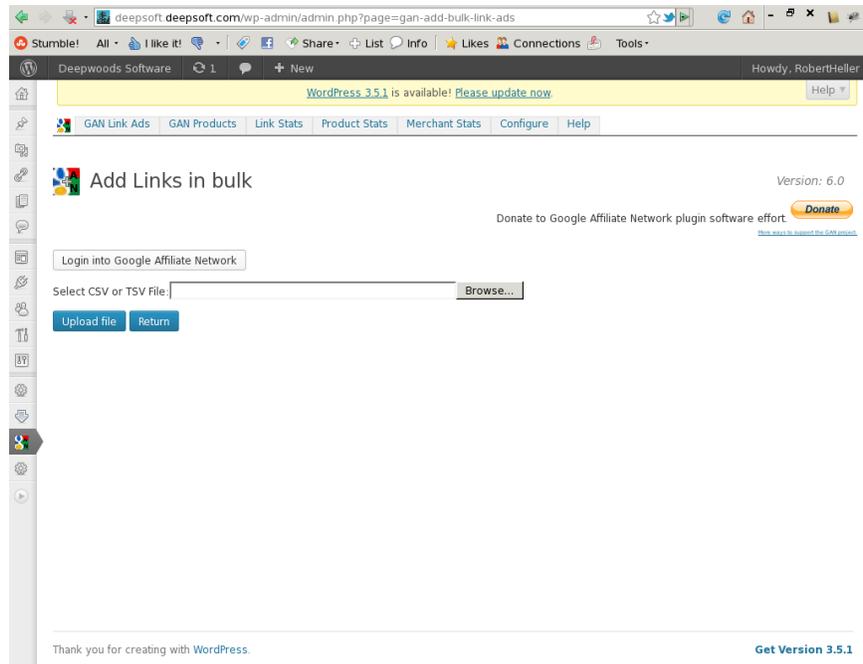


Figure 3: GAN Bulk Add Link Page

Link Subscriptions

A Tcl script is included to process E-Mailed Link 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.

Managing your product ad database

Managing your products is done from the GAN Product Database page, shown in Figure 6. The advertiser, product name, product brand, and enabled flag are displayed in this table. Products are initially sorted by product name, but can be sorted by product brand instead. It is possible to filter the displayed ad by advertiser. You can also search by Product Name. There is a button to enable all products. Products can be deleted or have their enable flag toggled in bulk. Ads can be individually edited, viewed, deleted or have their enable flags toggled. You can also delete, disable, and enable by merchant.

Inserting Products

In order to display products, you need to have some products in your database. There are two ways to insert products: manually, one by one or in bulk from a TSV (Tab

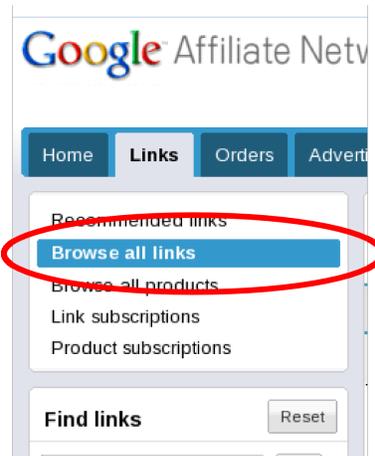


Figure 4: GAN Links Tab



Figure 5: GAN Export Links As

Separated Value) or CSV (Comma Separated Value) file. Manual insertion is done on the *Add new (Product)* admin page and bulk insertion is done on the *Add new (Products in) bulk* admin page.

Add new Product admin page (manual product insertion)

This page, shown in Figure 7, has a form for adding (and editing and viewing) a single product. Generally, this page is not usually used, see Section for adding products in bulk. The fields⁴ include:

- Advertiser:** This is the advertiser’s name.
- Product Name:** This is the name of the product.
- Product Description:** This is the description of the product.
- Tracking URL:** This is the “buy” link for the product.

⁴These fields correspond to the column headings in the TSV and CSV files generated by Google’s product list export.

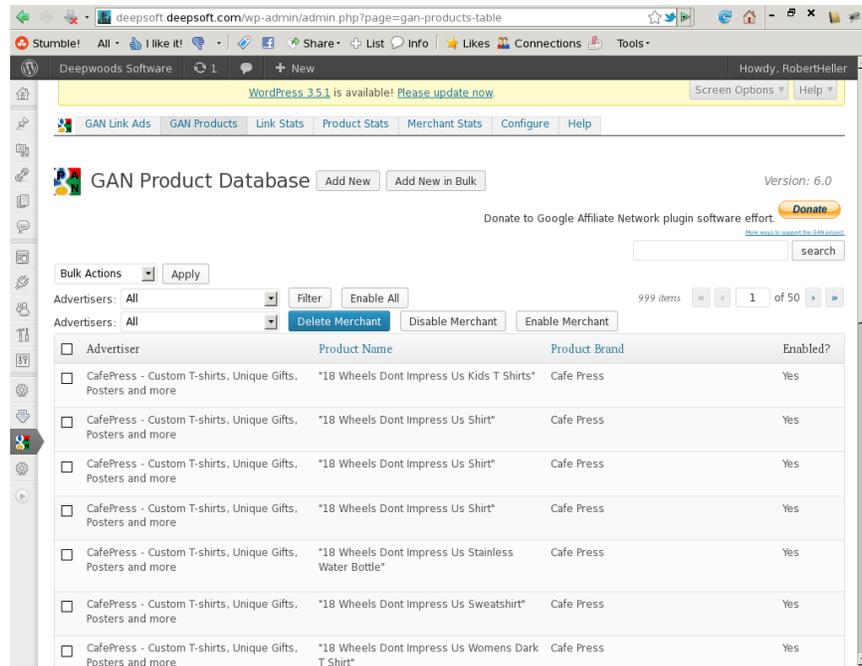


Figure 6: GAN Products Admin Page

Creative URL: This is the URL of the product’s image.

Product Category: This is the product’s category.

Product Brand: This is the product’s brand.

Product UPC: This is the product’s UPC.

Price: This is the product’s price.

Merchant ID: This is the advertiser id.

enabled? This indicates whether the product is enabled or not.

Add new products in bulk admin page (bulk product insertion)

This page, shown in Figure 8, uploads a TSV or CSV file of products previously downloaded from your Google Affiliate Network management page. You get this file by visiting your Google Affiliate Network management page and clicking the Products tab (see figure 9). On this page you can search for products that match a set of search terms. It is then possible to export these ads as a TSV or CSV file, using the Export As button and selecting “Tab Separated Values” option (see figure 10), which can then be downloaded. This same file can in turn be uploaded to the GAN plugin and the products in this file will be added to your product database.

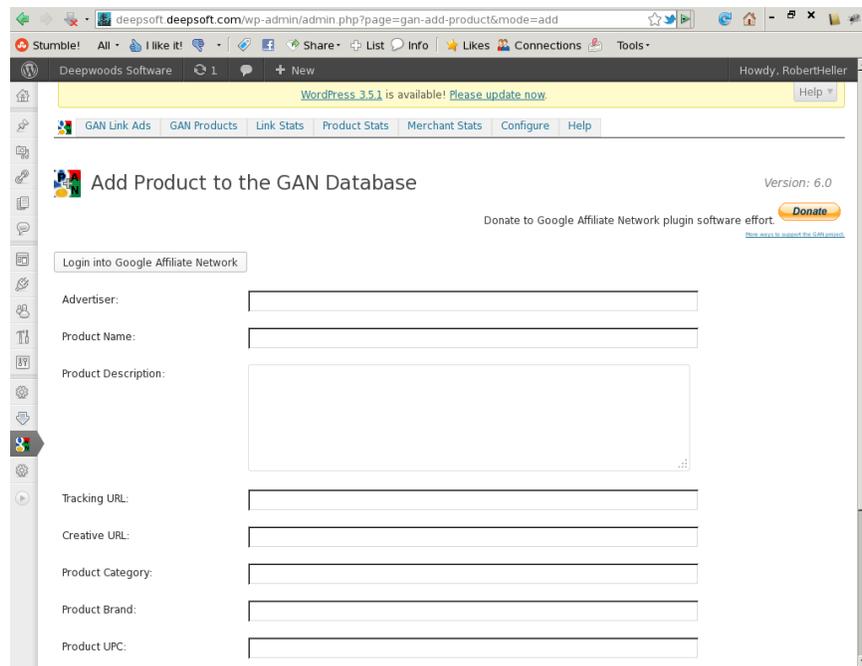


Figure 7: GAN Manual Add Product Page

Showing Ads

There are two ways to show ads on your pages and/or posts. You can use one of the three widgets (GAN Image Widget (for image link ads), GAN Widget (for text link ads), or GAN Product Widget (for product ads) or one of the three shortcodes (GAN_Text (for text link ads), GAN_Image (for image link ads), or GAN_Product (for product ads)). The widgets of course need to go into a 'sidebar' that supports widgets. The shortcodes can go into any post or page. They all generate an iframe tag.

GAN Widget

This widget (see Figure 11) shows text ads in a "sidebar" that supports widgets.

The GAN Widget has six parameters:

Number of ads to display: The number of ad links 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.

Advertisers: The parameter can be used to limit the ad links to a single advertiser. The default is All, which is to use ads from all advertisers.

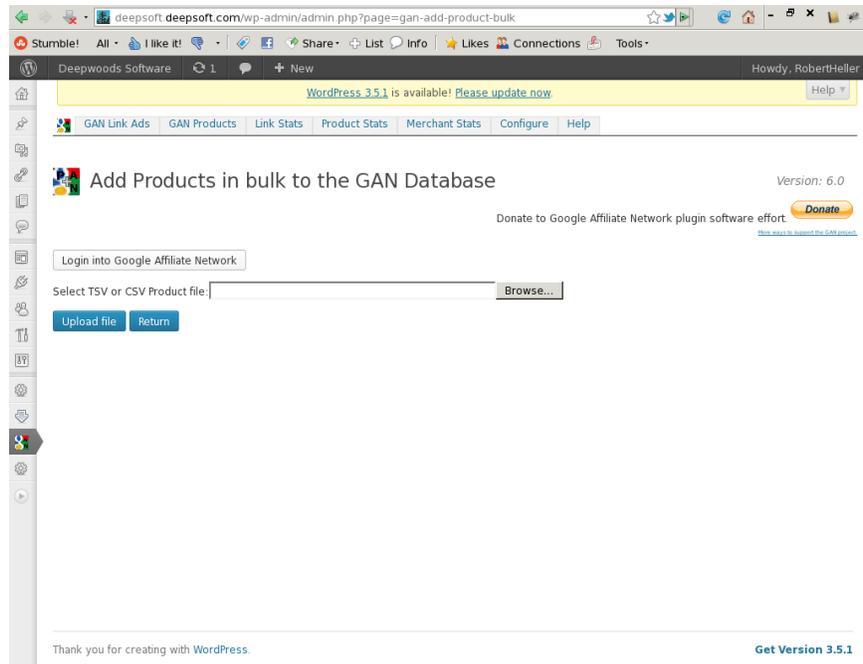


Figure 8: GAN Bulk Add Product Page

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

This widget (see Figure 12) 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 eight parameters:

Number of ads: The number of ad links 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 scraper type ad unit.

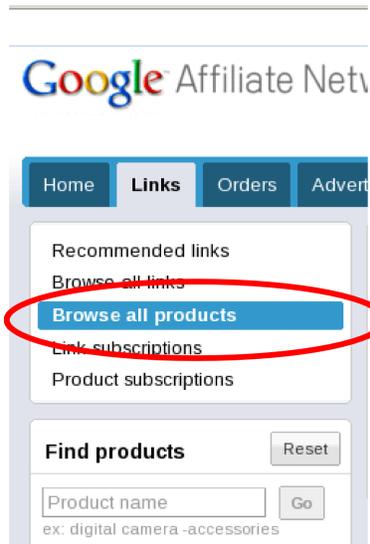


Figure 9: GAN Products Tab

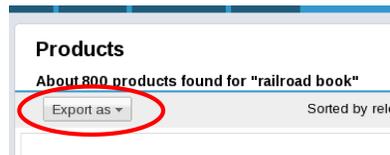


Figure 10: GAN Export Products

Advertisers: The parameter can be used to limit the ad links to a single advertiser. The default is All, which is to use ads from all advertisers.

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 Product Widget

This widget (see Figure 13) shows a product ad. Product ads contain an image of a product, with a link to the product buy page. There is generally a brief textual description of the product and the product's price.

The GAN Product Widget has nine parameters:

Orientation: The orientation of the ads. Horizontal means the product has the textual description to the right of the image and vertical means the product has the

Figure 11: GAN Widget

textual description below the image. Typically the horizontal orientation is suitable for a wide but short ad frame and the vertical orientation is suitable for sky scraper type ad unit. That is the vertical orientation is best in a narrow sidebar and the horizontal orientation would be suitable for a ‘side bar’ in the wide part of the page (such as a side bar that is between posts or above or below posts or page content).

Advertisers: The parameter can be used to limit the product ads to a single advertiser. The default is All, which is to use products from all advertisers.

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

Name Pattern: This is a pattern that is matched to the product name and if not empty will limit products to those that match this name.

Category Pattern: This is a pattern that is matched to the product category and if not empty will limit products to those that match this category.

Brand Pattern: This is a pattern that is matched to the product brand and if not empty will limit products to those that match this brand.

Description Pattern: This is a pattern that is matched to the product description and if not empty will limit products to those that match this description.

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.

The image shows a configuration window titled "GAN Image Widget". It contains several input fields and dropdown menus:

- Number of ads:** A text input field containing the number "1".
- Width:** A text input field containing "120".
- Height:** A text input field containing "60".
- Orientation:** A dropdown menu with "vertical" selected.
- Advertisers:** A dropdown menu with "All" selected.
- Target:** A dropdown menu with "Same Window" selected.
- Ad frame width:** An empty text input field.
- Ad frame height:** An empty text input field.

At the bottom of the window, there are two buttons: "Delete | Close" on the left and "Save" on the right.

Figure 12: GAN Image Widget

GAN_Text shortcode

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

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

maxads An integer, with the default being 4. The 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.

merchid The advertiser id to limit ad links to. An empty string means use link ads from all advertisers.

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

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

The image shows a configuration window for a 'GAN Product Widget'. It contains several settings:

- Orientation:** A dropdown menu set to 'vertical'.
- Advertisers:** A dropdown menu set to 'All'.
- Target:** A dropdown menu set to 'New Window or Tab'.
- Name Pattern:** An empty text input field.
- Category Pattern:** An empty text input field.
- Brand Pattern:** An empty text input field.
- Description Pattern:** A text input field containing the word 'linux'.
- Ad frame width:** A text input field containing the number '190'.
- Ad frame height:** A text input field containing the number '300'.

 At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: 'Delete | Close' on the left and 'Save' on the right.

Figure 13: GAN Product Widget

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 eight 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.

merchid The advertiser id to limit ad links to. An empty string means use link ads from all advertisers.

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]
```

GAN_Product shortcode

This shortcode inserts a product ad unit into a page or post. It is much like the GAN Product Widget.

The GAN_Product shortcode has same nine parameters as the GAN Product Widget:

orientation The orientation of the ads, one of “vertical” or “horizontal” (the default). The orientation of the ads. Horizontal means the product has the textual description to the right of the image and vertical means the product has the textual description below the image. 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. That is the vertical orientation is best in a narrow sidebar and the horizontal orientation would be suitable for a ‘side bar’ in the wide part of the page (such as a side bar that is between posts or above or below posts or page content).

merchid The parameter can be used to limit the product ads to a single advertiser. The default is “”, which is to use products from all advertisers.

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

namepat This is a pattern that is matched to the product name and if not empty will limit products to those that match this name.

catpat This is a pattern that is matched to the product category and if not empty will limit products to those that match this category.

brandpat This is a pattern that is matched to the product brand and if not empty will limit products to those that match this brand.

descrpat This is a pattern that is matched to the product description and if not empty will limit products to those that match this description.

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 – a horizontal product ad the full width of the post content column and 200 pixels high, limited to products with linux in their description:

```
[GAN_Product orientation="horizontal" ifwidth="100%"  
ifheight="200" target="new" merchid="" namepat="" catpat=""  
brandpat="" descrpat="linux"]
```

Using the GAN ad unit insertion media button



Figure 14: GAN Insert Ad Unit Media button

As of version 4.3, a “media button”, shown in Figure 14, 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 15, where the parameters can be easily selected to create a short code that will insert an ad unit (either for link ads or a product ad) 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 (links and products) and each merchant. When an ad from a given merchant is displayed, that merchant’s impression count is incremented. And when a given ad link or product 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 ad links or products, each of these ad links or products will be displayed fewer times than the ad links and products of a merchant with a smaller number of ad links or products. Each merchant will get the same number of total impressions and these impressions will be shared across all of the merchant’s ad links or products. Ad links that will expire sooner will also get “preferred” exposure and will tend to get more impressions, at least until they expire. Newly added merchants, ad links, and products will also get “preferred” exposure, since they will be starting with impression counts of zero. But over time, these “new” merchants and ads will catch up with the older merchants ad links, and products. It is possible to zero the impression counts of merchants, ad links, and products and this will “level” the playing field.

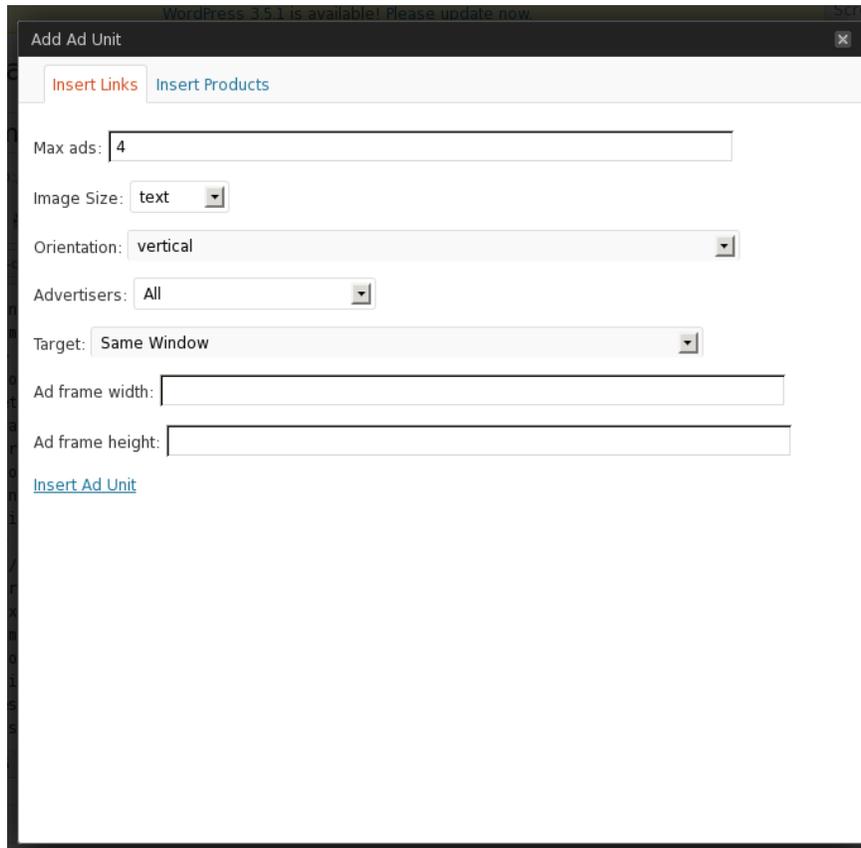


Figure 15: GAN Insert Ad Unit Dialog Box

Statistics

Ad links, Products, 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. Link Ad statistics can be filtered by advertiser and/or by size. Product statistics can be filtered by advertiser. It is possible to search Link Ad statistics and Product statistics.

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