

DISPLAY ADVERTISING HORROR STORIES

IT'S SO MUCH WORSE
WITH PICTURES

If our Paid Search Horror Stories didn't send you screaming into the night, you might be ready for Display Horror Stories: It's So Much Worse with Pictures. We revisit some of the most horrifying results we've seen in display advertising, and tell you how to avoid them.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Richard Clark, Technical Manager, joined the (un)Common Logic team in 2012 as an SEM Analyst, providing

detailed data analyses to clients and tools/technology analyses to the internal team. Before coming to (un)Common Logic, Richard was a Business Development Counselor with Austin Energy. He has an MBA in Marketing from American Intercontinental University and a BBA in Marketing from Concordia University, where he played on their conference-leading basketball team.

Sydney Sheedy



Sydney Sheedy, Account Manager at (un)Common Logic, has spent her entire career in data-driven marketing.

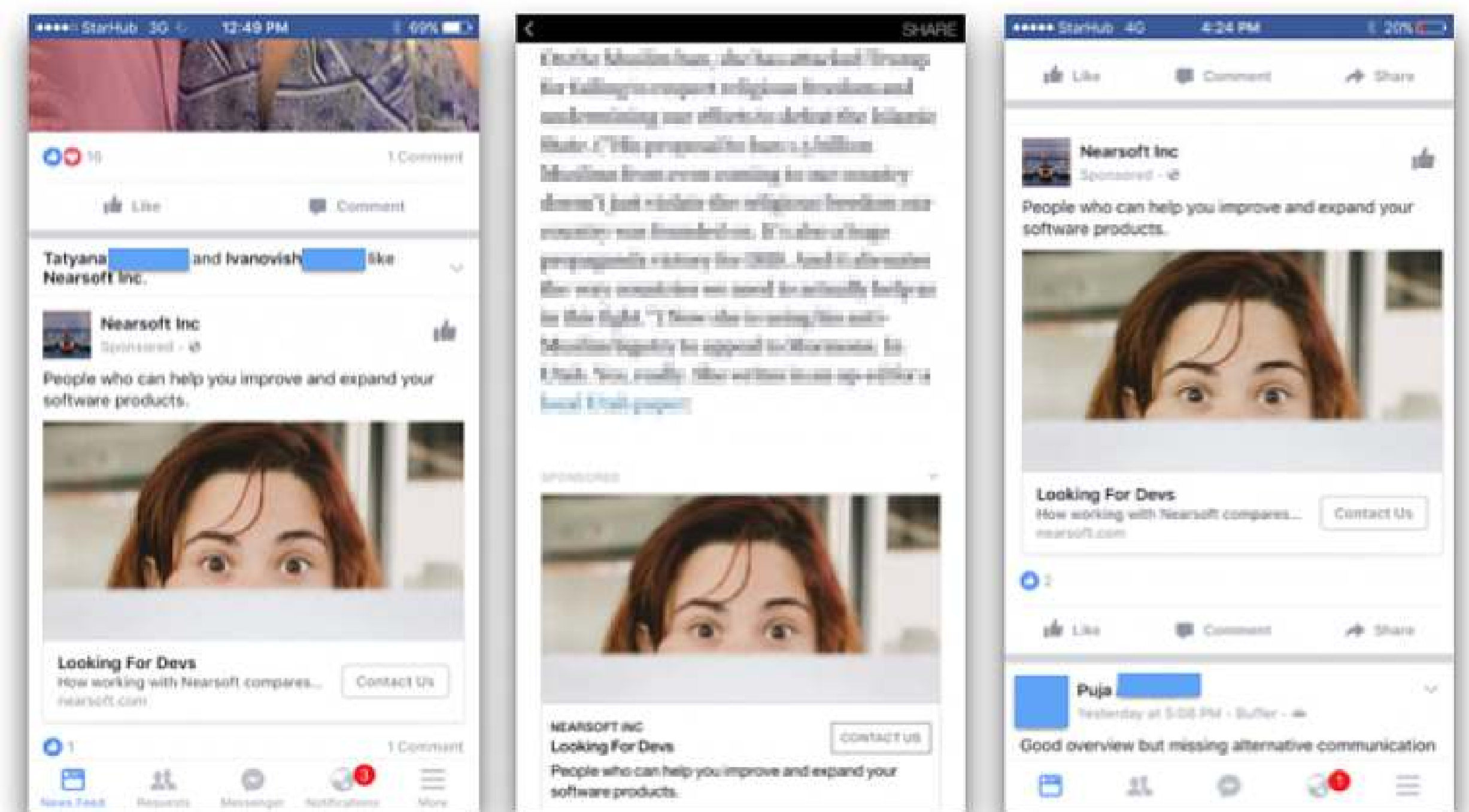
Since joining (un)Common Logic six years ago, she has further sharpened her skills in marketing analysis and client operations. She received her BBA in Marketing from Texas A&M University Central Texas, and has significant experience in marketing the online education space. Ever a fan of optimization, Sydney enjoys antique shopping and repurposing old furniture.

Programmatic display advertising can be a good investment; the real-time bidding algorithms can save money by responding instantly to fluctuations on various ad exchanges and by reducing management costs. But there are at least two dangers to programmatic, both caused by relying too much on the tools.

THE SKIN-CRAWLING SUSPICION THAT YOU'RE SURROUNDED BY REMARKETING DISPLAY ADS

It's one thing to accept the reality that remarketing ads follow you after you've visited a website and pop up as you proceed in your online travels. It's quite another to see a screen full of the same display ad in different sizes, looking like a computer screen from a dimension where there is only one company, one product, one ad to rule them all.

It's even worse when the images are of people... or just part of them, as this image, dubbed "peekaboo headhunter" by the Refuel4 blog, amply illustrates:



All of us have probably encountered this chilling beast. But while it's unnerving for users, it's positively appalling for advertisers, because it reduces conversions and revenue:

- ☠ **Best case scenario:** It hastens the onset of ad fatigue. There are only so many times a user can see your ad without tuning it out completely. Presenting it more than once on a page eats through that number of impressions quickly, rendering your ad obsolete faster than ever.

- ☠ **It lowers your click-through rate (CTR).** CTR is a simple ratio: clicks divided by impressions. With multiple impressions, that denominator gets larger, so even with a healthy number of clicks, the percentage itself will get smaller and smaller.

- ☠ **Worst-case scenario:** It does all that, and you're paying extra for it. If you're using a cost-per-thousand-impressions (CPM) model for any campaigns, multiple placements on the same page waste spend for no additional return. The main reason to use a CPM model is to ensure delivery of your ads to a guaranteed audience size. But if there's more than one ad per page, you're not even getting the benefit of using this model.

SPARE YOUR CUSTOMERS FROM THE SKIN-CRAWLING SUSPICION THAT THEY'RE SURROUNDED BY REMARKETING DISPLAY ADS

- ☠ **Know how many impressions your ads will have.** When determining how many impressions to show per day, don't forget to include all the ad exchanges that are placing your ads; they can multiply impressions significantly, weakening your ads' impact significantly, too.

- ☠ **Harness multiple placements to showcase your inventory.** Like the occasional horror movie villain fake-out, there's one situation in which same-page placements can actually work in your favor. If you're an ecommerce company with a substantial inventory, you can use dynamic shopping and display ads that feature a different product in each ad. Not only does this reduce ad fatigue, it gives you an extra data point on individual products' click/conversion performance against each other.

(un)Common Logic conducts regular reviews and evaluations of programmatic display vendors to keep our clients from overwhelming users with too many of the same ads on one page. If you're not sure you're getting the most out of your paid search efforts, contact us for an audit to determine if excessive impressions are the cause.

The Skin-Crawling Suspicion That You're Surrounded by Remarketing Display Ads is bad enough, for both users and advertisers. But it has a much meaner cousin...

THE BRAND-DESTROYING DISASTER OF DAMAGING PLACEMENTS

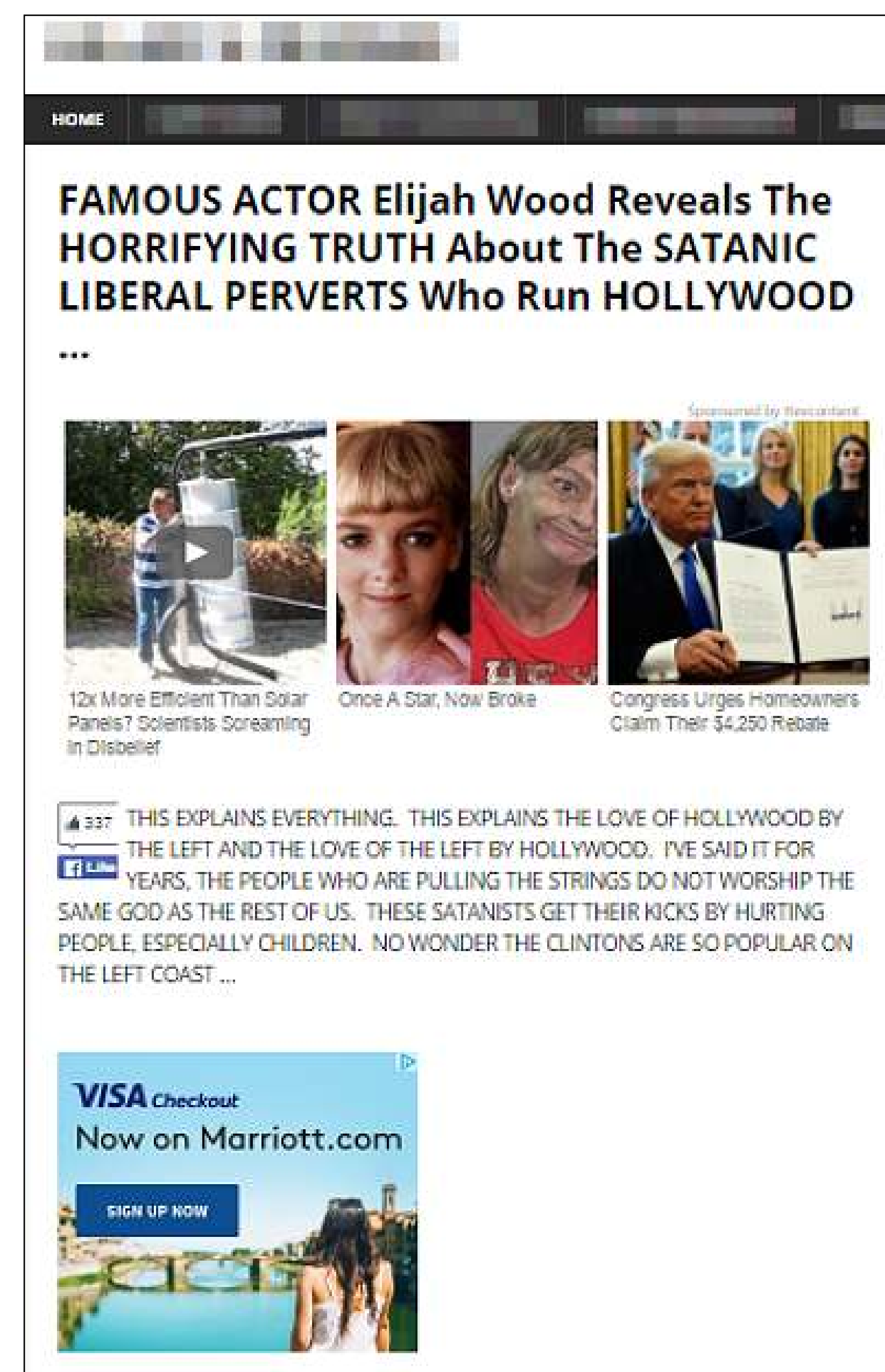
By nature, programmatic algorithms don't judge the quality or purpose of a site before placing an ad there. (In fairness, they can't.) Which can lead to some bone-chilling placements:

- Earlier this year, JP Morgan Chase discovered that their ads were running on more than 400,000 sites—including a site about imprisoning Hillary Clinton under a headline claiming that actor Elijah Wood had revealed “the HORRIFYING TRUTH about the SATANIC LIBERAL PERVERTS who run HOLLYWOOD.”
- In November of last year, Kellogg Co. was notified that their ads were running on a site noted for hate speech. They immediately pulled their ads, and the following month, major programmatic company AppNexus blacklisted the site from all their placements.

- Even more horrifying, YouTube's programmatic algorithm yielded:
 - A Sandals Resorts ad next to a video from a terrorist group promoting jihad in Kenya
 - An ad for the Mercedes E-Class sedan beneath a pro-ISIS video
 - An ad for a hospice charity at the bottom of a pro-Nazi video replete with swastikas and burning crosses

Those placements should send you screaming into the night—but before you go, we recommend taking preventive steps to ensure your ads aren't venturing into similarly dangerous turf.

Companies whose ads also appeared under this headline include Microsoft, Chevrolet, Dell, IBM, Toshiba, Honda, Sears, and JP Morgan Chase.



PREVENT ^{THE} BRAND-DESTROYING DISASTER OF DAMAGING PLACEMENTS

As with excessive placements, human interaction and oversight are key to escaping this monster.

☠ **Start with the blacklist.** Blacklisting of sites that are clearly fatal to your—or anyone’s—brand is an essential first step. Some programmatic vendors like AppNexus have blacklisted the worst sites from their possible placements, but not all. So be sure your team or agency has a blacklist that culls the major dangers.

☠ **Move on to the whitelist.** Unfortunately, harmful sites keep popping up like Gremlins, so the danger

of disastrous placements is always present. A list of sites where you want your ads to run can protect not only your brand but your advertising investment as well.

JP Morgan Chase, whose ads were running on 400,000+ sites, investigated those placements and discovered that only 12,000 (less than 3%) of them produced any clicks. They tasked interns with visiting all 12,000 sites and determining if each site met a list of criteria for inclusion on the company’s whitelist. Only 5,000 sites made the cut—but those 5,000 have delivered the same results as the initial 400,000 sites.

If revenue is the most important goal *by a significant margin*, having your ads up on all kinds of sites could work out. However, if brand development and relationship management are also on your list of goals, selecting the sites where your ads should run is crucial.

And even if revenue is the prime or only consideration, it’s worth having your team or agency review placement reports on a regular basis to make sure your ads are running on sites where users are likely to click—and to ensure your ads aren’t associated with terrorism.

(un)Common Logic conducts regular reviews and evaluations of programmatic display vendors to keep our clients from appearing on brand-damaging sites. If you’re not sure where your ads are displaying, contact us for a paid search audit.

FRIEND ^{OR} FIEND: CHOOSE YOUR DISPLAY ADVERTISING METRICS CAREFULLY

Like a fictional British doctor, display metrics can work for you or against you. Choosing the right metrics for display performance can provide the insight of a brilliant Dr. Jekyll, guiding you to make wise data-driven decisions. But if you choose the wrong metrics, you'll have the equivalent of a Mr. Hyde endangering everything in sight as you make decisions based on misleading data.

DISPLAY-ONLY METRICS

There's a definite danger in evaluating your display activities as a self-contained unit. It's always a bad idea for a team to split up in a horror movie, and it's also perilous to split up your marketing channels when evaluating performance.

The true value of your display program can only be understood within the context of the customer journey. Display ads themselves might not lead to direct conversions, but they often form several of the touchpoints necessary to convert a customer. If you only evaluate the

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strength of display ads by their "last click," their performance can seem disappointing, and might make them a candidate for elimination.

But that would be extremely unwise. In sports terms, display might not score a lot of direct goals, but it's great at assists. In horror movie terms, display might not slay the monster, but it's the character who throws the essential weapon or yells the crucial piece of information to the hero, allowing them to slay the monster.

Rather than evaluating display as a standalone silo, be sure to integrate all your data to include every step along the customer journey, so you can get an accurate impression of the role played by display. Data integration includes sales and revenue-based data, for a complete picture of how all your marketing channels affect the company.

VIEW-THROUGH CONVERSIONS

It's easy to be enchanted by view-through conversions; after all, they often look very impressive. However, performance reporting shouldn't include all of them. There's a strong chance of counting the same view-through conversion twice (the dreaded Evil Twin Syndrome), artificially inflating performance stats in a way that will almost certainly not line up with revenue results. Not only can that lead to faulty decisions, it can also damage the credibility of the marketing department.

That said, view-through conversions can be very useful for measuring the impact and reach of individual ads and display as a whole. This information is most helpful on an internal team level, so make sure your team or agency is using a window of only a few days to track the most recent sales cycle without any unrelated impressions from weeks earlier.

CLICK-THROUGH RATE

Evaluating display performance by click-through rate (CTR) can be misleading for several reasons.

- ☠ **Artificially low:** As noted above, display can often play a supporting role in conversions. Display ads themselves might not prompt a converted click, but they can be an essential part of the overall campaign that prompts a converted click. Judging them by CTR alone can underestimate the impact of display as a whole as well as the performance of individual ads.
- ☠ **Artificially high:** Not all clicks are part of the customer journey—or even generated by humans.
 - ☠ A 2016 survey by a mobile technology company found that 60% of clicks on mobile banner ads are accidental, and those accidental clicks make users feel annoyed, frustrated, and/or angry. Not a conversion-friendly situation, to be sure.
 - ☠ Additionally, click fraud (when clicks are generated by bots rather than people) is on the rise. One study reports that in the first 4 months of 2017, the prevalence of fraudulent clicks on desktop devices rose from 19.9% to 24.1%. On mobile devices, it's slightly better, but still on the rise: from 12.8% of mobile clicks in January to 14.2% of clicks in April.

- ☠ **Possibly not even relevant:** If the objective of your display campaign is to drive visibility and awareness for branding purposes, clicks and traffic aren't the point. Ad position and viewable impressions are more important, as is making sure your impressions are from the right places and in the right amount.

To get a more accurate determination of CTR, consider investing in tools that test and monitor for click fraud and make sure your team can spot the signs of accidental or fraudulent clicks within their analytics software.

MAKE THE MOST OF DISPLAY ADVERTISING METRICS

- ☠ Pursue end-to-end and multichannel data to keep display performance in perspective.
- ☠ Make sure your team or agency knows the best parameters to use when evaluating view-through conversions and other potentially misleading metrics.
- ☠ Ensure your agency or team has both the tools and expertise to determine the validity of display ad clicks.

As a data-driven agency, (un)Common Logic knows which metrics matter and which don't. If you'd like to ensure that your display metrics are giving you a complete, accurate picture, contact us for a paid search audit.

Your trip through the haunted house of digital marketing disasters is almost over. So let us leave you with one last scare...

THE MIND-MELTING MISMATCHES OF AUTOMATED IMAGE SELECTION

Earlier this year, Google removed legacy text remarketing ads from its Display Network and automatically upgraded the look of those ads to a responsive ad format. As a part of this shift, AdWords started including images with the ad text. Depending on the placement, one of these ads would appear:

You might be wondering where the image in the ads came from, since the original ad was text-only. It came from the depths of Google's AdWords algorithm, which chose these images automatically when converting the ads.

And while the image in the ads shown on the right might not be a *great* match for the ad content or subject, it's not too far removed. However, not all ads are so fortunate; in fact, some of them verge on madness. Come with us now as we gaze through **The Gallery of Mind-Melting Mismatches in Automated Image Selection...**

Clockwise from bottom left:

- ☠ Large standard display ad
- ☠ Large native display ad
- ☠ Small native display ad
- ☠ Large text display ad



Decorative Tile

Styles for Every Budget. Get Your Exclusive [redacted] Coupon!



The subject of the image isn't related to tile, and there isn't even any tile visible on any surface. **Mind-Melting Mismatch!**



Single Mother Assistance

Access to Low Income Services Get Financial Resources, Help, Aid



Even with a very clear hint in the headline text, that image is a **Mom-Missing Mind-Melting Mismatch!**



Paging Systems By [redacted]

Get the Most Features & Best Value. 24/7 Live Support. Get a Quote!



The company makes paging systems for restaurants and hospitals. It has literally nothing to do with content management systems. **Mind-Melting Mismatch!**

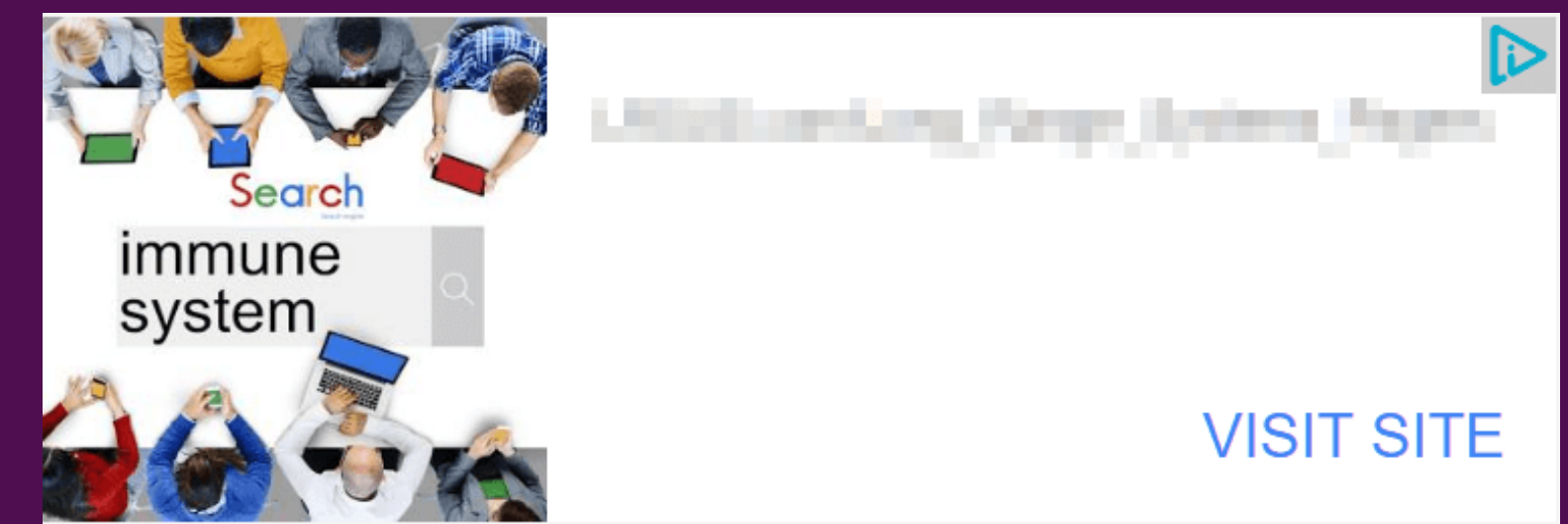


Save on Men's Glasses

Official Site. 12 Month Guarantee. Start Curating Your Collection Now!



You came so close, AdWords algorithm. And yet... **Mind-Melting Mismatch!**



Same pager company, but now paired with an image that seems to be promoting web searches for "immune system." With no way to add context with copy, this is a **MAJOR Mind-Melting Mismatch!**



Drupal Certification

Get Prepared with Everything You Need to Know for the Developer Exam



And this may be the most disturbing of all. Not only does Drupal certification have nothing whatsoever to do with the medical profession, there aren't any words in the ad copy that suggest any relevance to health-care. Don't get too close, **for this is the MEGA Mind-Melting Mismatch!**

These mismatches are especially deadly because they're for remarketing campaigns, which have a much higher frequency and visibility than regular display ads. So users who had visited those companies' websites and then seen those bizarre ads would be confused, and the brand's perception would suffer greatly.

An internal danger lurks in these ads as well: other members of your company who frequent the company website are likely to see remarketing ads. If a CEO, department head or board member were to see ads like those in the gallery, their perception of the marketing department would be similarly damaged.

Now you have beheld the consequences when the mindless bots within Google assign a stock photo of their own choosing to the ad. If you're getting cold sweats recalling Rise of the Scripts from Paid Search Horror Stories, there's good reason: once again, human oversight is crucial.

In fact, if there's one thing that unites all these horror stories, it's this: Only human intelligence and attention to detail will save search marketing from these terrors.

AVOID ^{THE} MIND-MELTING MISMATCHES OF AUTOMATED IMAGE SELECTION

- ☠ Have your team or agency review all your display advertising images, especially for text ads on the display network. If in doubt, pause ads.
- ☠ Invest in ad images that convey the benefits of your offering, the market segment you specialize in, the characteristics of your brand, or some combination of these qualities.
- ☠ Ensure that at least one member of your team is seeking out or receiving regular updates on algorithm or function changes.

Because human intelligence and high-touch management are central to who we are, (un)Common Logic reviews our clients' display advertising regularly, with additional reviews following any major changes in functions or algorithms. If you're unsure what images are showing with your ads, contact us for a paid search audit.

If there's one thing that unites all these horror stories, it's this: Only human intelligence, smart strategy, and attention to detail will save display advertising from these terrors. If you're having any issues with your display advertising, we can help you find a way out of the nightmare. Call us at 1-877-422-2590, email contactus@uncommonlogic.com, or just visit www.uncommonlogic.com.