

The background is a vibrant, abstract painting with thick brushstrokes in shades of red, blue, green, and yellow. On the left side, there is a black silhouette of a person with a large, rounded head, standing on a dark rectangular base. The overall composition is dark and moody, with the colorful abstract background contrasting sharply with the black silhouette.

**Known**

**Brands Appearing  
in Illicit Content**

February 11th, 2025

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## TL;DR Highlights

Adalytics research has reported that digital advertisements from large brands had appeared on an ad-supported, anonymous, free, image and sharing website, [imgbb.com](https://imgbb.com), alongside explicit imagery of a young child.

Multiple ad tech vendors, including Amazon, Google, Criteo, Microsoft, and others place ads on [imgbb.com](https://imgbb.com) potentially leading to the inadvertent funding of a website hosting Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).

Some brand safety vendors (including DoubleVerify and IAS) have marked ad impressions on [imgbb.com](https://imgbb.com) as “brand safe” even when ads appeared alongside explicit content.

Adalytics found that many major brands’ ads had ads served via vendors like Google and Amazon that appeared on [imgbb.com](https://imgbb.com).

Known’s internal analysis shows that Known programmatic advertising is unaffected. Known did not run a single impression on any of these specific sites, nor on any that include a much longer list of ~50 domains that allow user generated image content. Known did run ads on [imgur.com](https://imgur.com), which is the image hoster of choice for Reddit and a site with a strict anti-nudity policy.



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## CONTEXT

# Key points from the Adalytics [Executive Summary](#)

**imgbb.com** (and its affiliate, **ibb.co**) is an ad-supported, anonymous, free, image ad sharing website. The websites do not require users to register before being able to upload and share a photo on its platform. The website itself appears to go to lengths to hide its ownership. According to third party sources, the website has over forty million page views per month - more monthly page views than the websites for the Financial Times, Los Angeles Times, Politico or the website of the Library of Congress.

While conducting research, Adalytics unintentionally and accidentally came across a historical, archived instance where a major advertiser's digital ads were served to a bot that was crawling and archiving an **ibb.co** page which appeared to be displaying explicit imagery of a young child. Adalytics immediately ceased reviewing the archive of the explicit child content, and reported the page to the FBI, DHS HSI special agents, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P).

**ibb.co** and **imgbb.com** appear to allow anonymous upload of photos without requiring users to register. They also appear to allow users to hide specific photos from Google and Bing search results.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) **imgbb.com** has been notified dozens of times over the course of 2021, 2022, and 2023 that the platform was hosting child sexual abuse materials (CSAM). In addition to hosting CSAM, **imgbb.com** and **ibb.co** appear to host explicit adult content as well as copyright infringing materials. The website

also appears to host explicit depictions of canine-human bestiality and zoophilia which may construe animal abuse. Reddit appears to block or ban **imgbb.com** and **ibb.com** photo sharing links from its platform.

**imgbb.com** appears to support its free image hosting service by displaying digital ads from vendors such as Amazon, Google, Criteo, Quantcast, Microsoft, Outbrain, TripleLift, Zeta Global, Nexxen and others. It is important to note that Google AdX, Google Ad Manager and DV360 do not appear to be actively transacting ads on **imgbb.com** or **ibb.co** as of January 2025.

Many major advertisers appeared to have had their ads placed on the website which has been known - since at least 2021 - to host some amounts of CSAM. These advertisers may have inadvertently contributed funding to a website that is known to host and/or distribute CSAM (see [Adalytics Executive Summary](#) for list of brands impacted).

Many of the advertisers whose ads appeared next to explicit content on **imgbb.com** reported that their adtech vendors, such as Amazon, do not provide advertisers with page URL level reporting. This is especially problematic in the context of a media publisher such as **imgbb.com**, where much of the content can only be seen if a user knows the exact page URL to check.

Multiple major advertisers reported that their brand safety vendors had also marked 100% of measured ad impressions served on **ibb.co** and **imgbb.com** as "brand safe" and/or "brand suitable". Independent data confirmed that some of these ads had served on explicit, sexual content.

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## Known's clients were not impacted

Known's internal analysis shows that Known programmatic advertising did not run a single impression on any of the above sites nor on any that included a much longer list of ~50 domains that allow user generated image content. We did have minimal spend on imgur.com, the image hoster of choice for Reddit and a site with a strict anti-nudity policy.

## How Known's programmatic teams ensure safety and brand suitability

Known's proactive programmatic inventory strategy, centered on premium partnerships and Private Marketplace (PMP) buys via The Trade Desk and Amazon DSP, effectively shields our programmatic campaigns from exposure on sites like imgbb.com.

We prioritize PMPs to establish direct, transparent relationships with vetted publishers. This curated environment provides superior control over ad placements. Unlike open exchanges, PMPs allow us to pre-select inventory from trusted partners, ensuring brand safety. Our approach offers full site transparency, allowing us to avoid questionable domains and content categories. While this strategy potentially limits reach somewhat and may increase costs compared to open exchange buying, the protection of brand reputation and the prevention of inadvertent support for harmful content are paramount as illustrated by this situation.

## Client Recommendations

### 01

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Known already limits programmatic buying almost exclusively to Private Marketplace (PMPs) to ensure we are providing the utmost in brand safety, suitability and quality. In the rare cases where we do buy on the Open Market (primarily retargeting campaigns), we have extensive internally curated domain block lists and also apply safety vendor tags for additional protection. Many clients have multiple agencies and internal teams executing media on their behalf. It is important to work with those agencies to ensure they executing in a way that ensures your brand only appears in high-quality, safe environments.

### 02

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Many media partners offer non-owned media inventory (Retail Media Networks, Managed Service partners, etc.) to extend the reach of their core media assets. It is important to verify where these partners are buying and serving your ads and demand the reporting detail required to validate ad placement at the page level.