

February 2026

# what marketers are asking



*“How many products, services and ads online are fake?”*





# 73% of American adults have experienced at least one form of online scam or attack

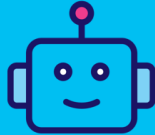



The internet is facing a crisis of reality and much of what is online today - whether its audiences, advertising, products & services and even content itself - **is not real.**

**Brands and consumers are both deeply affected** by the persistent issues on the internet including massive deceptions and online fraud, which collectively adds up to over \$100 billion in losses to bad actors, scammers and criminals across websites and social media platforms

In this piece, we examine the impact and associated costs of online scams on consumers and the revenues garnered by digital platforms from 'scam ads.'

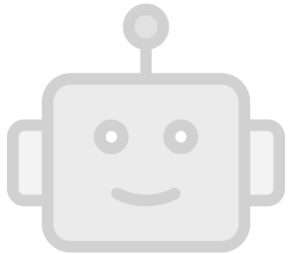
[Download our full report 'The Illusions of the Internet' to learn more](#)

## A Crisis of Reality: When It Comes to the Internet, How Much of it is Fake?

<p><b>1</b></p>  <p><b>Audience</b> How many people online are fake?</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>  <p><b>Advertising</b> How much ad inventory is fake?</p>	<p><b>3</b></p>  <p><b>Products &amp; Services</b> How many products, services and ads online are fake?</p>	<p><b>4</b></p>  <p><b>Content</b> How much online content is fake?</p>
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# How many products, services and ads online are fake?

1



## Audience

How many people online are fake?

2



## Advertising

How much ad inventory is fake?

3



## Products & Services

How many products, services and ads online are fake?

4



## Content

How much online content is fake?

# Uncovering the Realities of Products & Services on the Internet

1

## Audience

How many people online are fake?

Bots & 'Bad Bots'

Proliferation of 'Bad' Bots

Fake Accounts on Social Media

2

## Advertising

How much ad inventory is fake?

Opaque Ad Placements

Cost of Digital Ad Fraud

Ad Fraud Impact on Brands

Programmatic Ad Fraud

App Store Ad Fraud

Ad Blocking

3

## Products & Services

How many products, services and ads online are fake?

Consumer Scam Impact

Cost of Social Media Scams

Social Media Scam Ads

Platform Revenue from Scams

Counterfeit Goods

Online Marketplace Scams

4

## Content

How much online content is fake?

Scams and Spam

AI Slop

Deepfakes

'Made-For-Advertising' Sites

Pirated Content

# Nearly three in four American adults have been hit by online scams, exposing deep consumer risks across digital platforms

% of American adults who say they have...



73%

**experienced** at least one form of **online scam or attack**  
*(fraud, phishing, scam-product ads, etc.)*



32%

**experienced** such a **scam in the past year**  
*(2024–2025)*

Source: Pew Research, *Online Scams and Attacks in America Today*, July 2025.

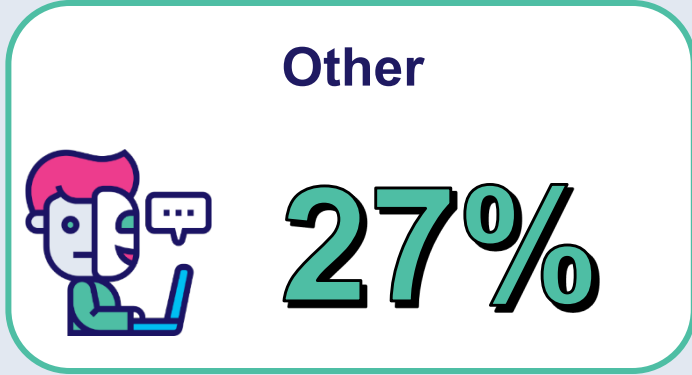
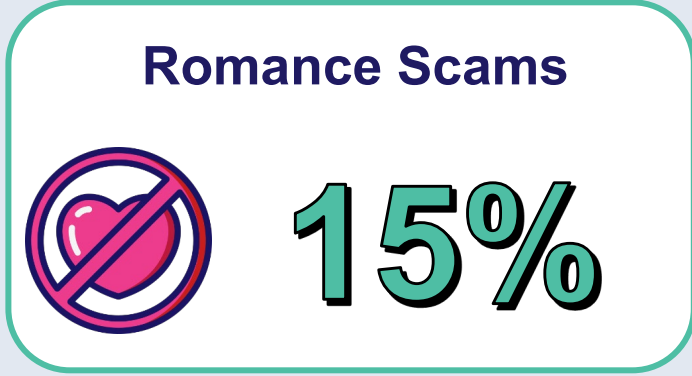
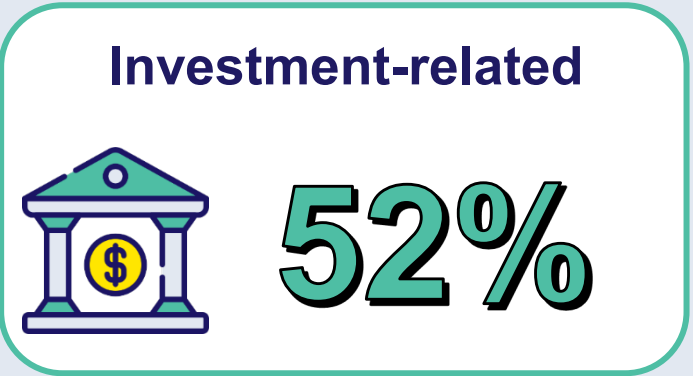
# Scams on social media platforms that tug at the wallet, heart and mind of their unsuspecting users cost U.S. consumers nearly \$2 billion annually



# \$1.9 Billion

in consumer losses from social media scams in 2024, accounting for the highest overall source of losses to scams

U.S. Consumer Social Media Fraud Losses by Type\*  
2024



Source: U.S. Federal Trade Commission, *A Scammy Snapshot of 2024*, March 2025. Based on reports to Consumer Sentinel. \*U.S. Federal Trade Commission, *All Fraud Reports by Contact Method – Top Subcategories by Total Losses for Contact Method: Social Media*, Q1-Q4 2024, as of 1/30/26.

# Social media platforms have created a breeding ground for product scams, where they have been given leeway to ripoff consumers and businesses



70%

of newly active advertisers on Instagram and Facebook were promoting scams, poor quality products or illicit goods



8 to 32

financial fraud strikes\* are allowed for Meta advertisers before their account is banned



4,400 ads

were found impersonating a real business' name and phone number on Instagram and Facebook, while the original, legitimate business purchased only 15 ads across those two platforms

Source: New York Times, [Meta Battles an 'Epidemic of Scams' as Criminals Flood Instagram and Facebook](#), 5/15/25. \*Strikes on Meta for advertisers are a punitive, step-by-step enforcement system applied when ads or connected pages violate Community Standards or Advertising Policies.

# In 2024, 10% of Meta’s total revenue (\$16 billion) reportedly came from ads promoting scams and banned goods across their platforms

# \$16 Billion

of Meta’s revenue came from ads promoting scams and banned goods in 2024, estimated at 10% of total revenue

# 15 Billion

‘higher risk’ scam advertisements daily on Meta platforms in 2024

Source: Reuters, *Meta is earning a fortune on a deluge of fraudulent ads, documents show*, 11/6/25. Estimates from Meta internal projections.

**“It is easier to advertise scams on Meta platforms than Google.”**

Meta Internal Review  
via Reuters (11/6/25)


**"Scams don't just harm individual victims, they undermine trust in our entire advertising ecosystem, which is the very foundation of our business model."**

Meta Newsroom  
(12/3/2025)




December 15, 2025

**Meta’s \$3 Billion Fraud Problem: How Chinese Advertisers Exploited Facebook and Instagram**



December 15, 2025

**Meta tolerates rampant ad fraud from China to safeguard billions in revenue**



December 3, 2025

Meta's detection systems identified and disrupted nearly **12 million accounts across Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp** in the first half of 2025 associated with **criminal scam centers**.

# Online marketplaces and social media are a hotbed of activity for counterfeit products and services which negatively impacts brands and consumers



59%

of online **counterfeit cases** detected were found on **marketplaces**



21%

of online **counterfeit goods** cases now start on **social media**

Source: Red Points via HomePage News, *SPECIAL REPORT: Red Points Study Highlights Escalating E-Commerce Counterfeit Threat*, October 2025.

# Fake products are proliferating across online marketplaces, including Chinese companies that have been accused of misleading U.S. consumers



November 7, 2025

TikTok Shop faces deluge of 70 million products that violate its terms. AI is partly to blame.



August 6, 2025

How TikTok Shop and Social Commerce Are Fueling Counterfeits



December 3, 2025

Arizona AG sues Temu over allegations of data collection, ripping off businesses



March 28, 2024

Brands report a rise in imposter advertisers on platforms like Meta & TikTok



July 8, 2025

Shein fined \$47 million for controversial practices



November 4, 2024

Most Facebook Marketplace rental listings appear to be scams



February 18, 2022

US adds AliExpress and WeChat to online fraud and piracy list



September 4, 2024

7 Common Temu Scams and How to Avoid Them

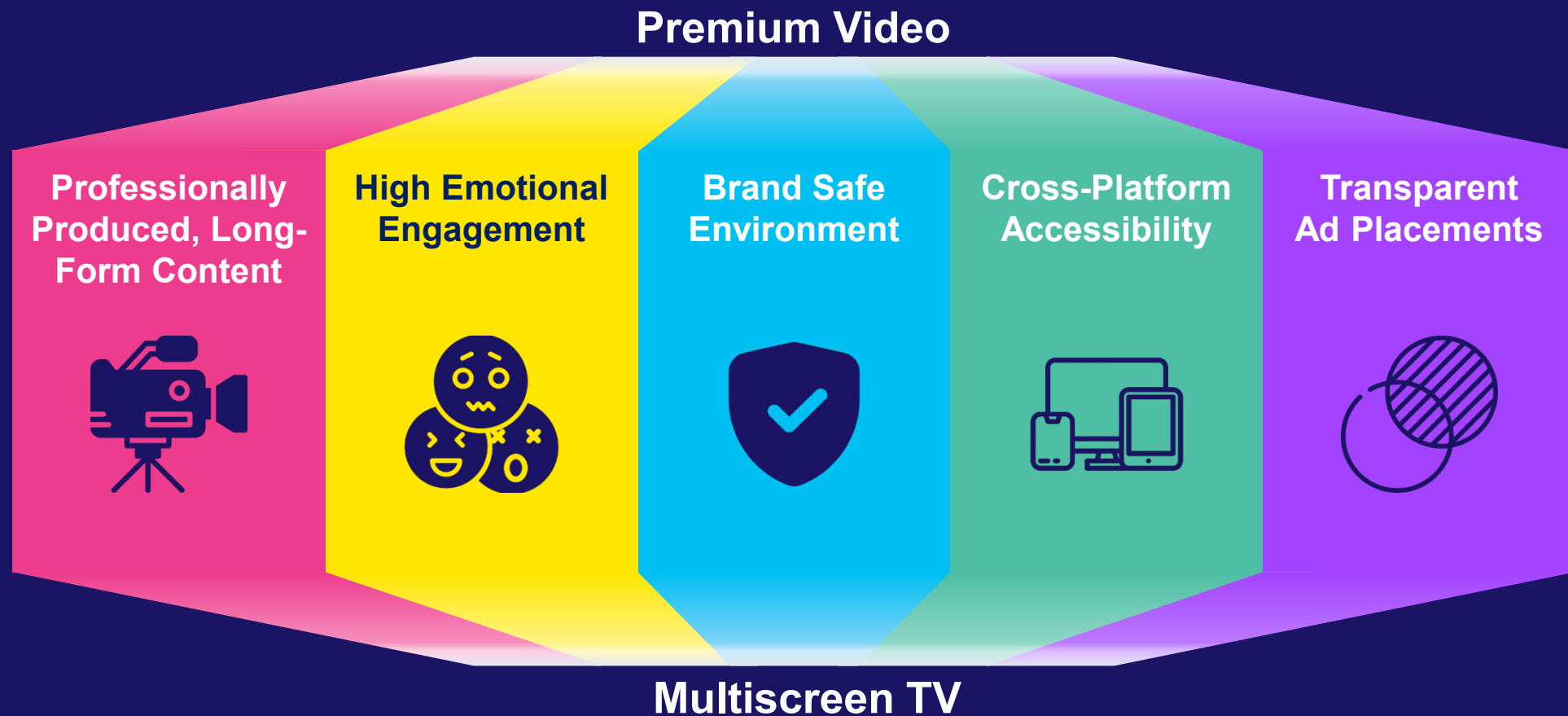
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By contrast, Premium Video features **legitimate brands in trusted advertising environments** which builds and enhances the reputation of other advertisers



# The defining pillars of Premium Video align directly with the marketer benefits of Multiscreen TV

Professionally produced, long-form content with high emotional engagement in a brand safe environment regardless of platform or device and through transparent media partners

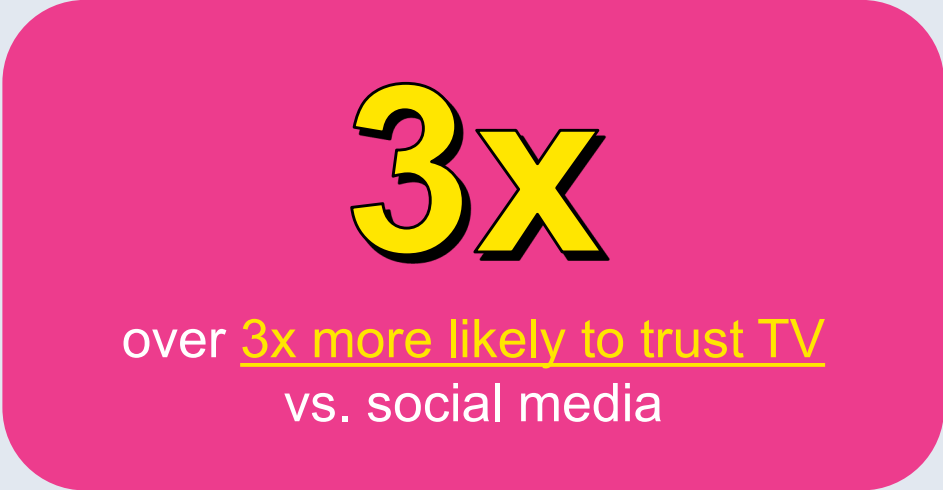


# Multiscreen TV is the most trusted media platform by consumers, who are also three times more likely to trust TV over social media

“Trust is very important for brand marketing. It’s the driver for purchasing behavior for most consumers. A lot of the time, trust is going to play a different role in the relationships consumers have with brands.”

- Matt Prince, Head of PR, Taco Bell  
*Taco Bell's Matt Prince on how trust ties brands to new consumers, WARC, 9/24/24*

TV is the #1 trusted media platform among adults, and they are...



Source: VAB analysis of MRI-Simmons Fall 2025 USA Study, A18+. Q: What is the media you trust the most? (pick one: TV, radio, podcasts, mobile internet, internet on computer, social media, magazines, newspapers).

Multiscreen TV platforms offer trillions of opportunities to connect annually with real audiences through placements in transparent media environments

P2+ Impressions on Ad-Supported TV  
National Broadcast & Cable TV, CY 2025

**5.0 Trillion**  
**Reported P2+ Impressions**  
*(Equivalentized)*

Source: VAB analysis of Nielsen AdIntel, 1/1/25-12/31/25, C3, Panel Only, P2+, Sources: Network TV, Spanish Language Network TV, Cable TV, Spanish Language Cable TV & Syndicated TV. Excludes Promos and PSAs. Impressions are equivalentized.

# Multiscreen TV platforms attract over 12,500 legitimate brands nationally which builds and enhances the reputation of other TV advertisers

## Advertisers on Ad-Supported TV

National Broadcast & Cable TV, CY 2025

12,699 Brands

### Sampling of Top U.S. National TV Advertisers



Source: VAB analysis of Nielsen Ad Intel, Brand Variants, 12/1/25-12/31/25. Sources: Network TV, Spanish Language Network TV, National Cable TV & National Spanish Language Cable TV.

# Marketers should always ask questions of their media partners to ensure their ads are placed in trusted, transparent and accountable platforms

A graphic with a dark blue background and a pink-to-purple gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Know" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

**Know**

Know precisely where your video ad campaign is running and exactly who is watching it.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a yellow-to-green gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Stop" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

**Stop**

Stop considering any ad video "premium" that lacks a fully transparent ad process.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a teal-to-cyan gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Insist" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

**Insist**

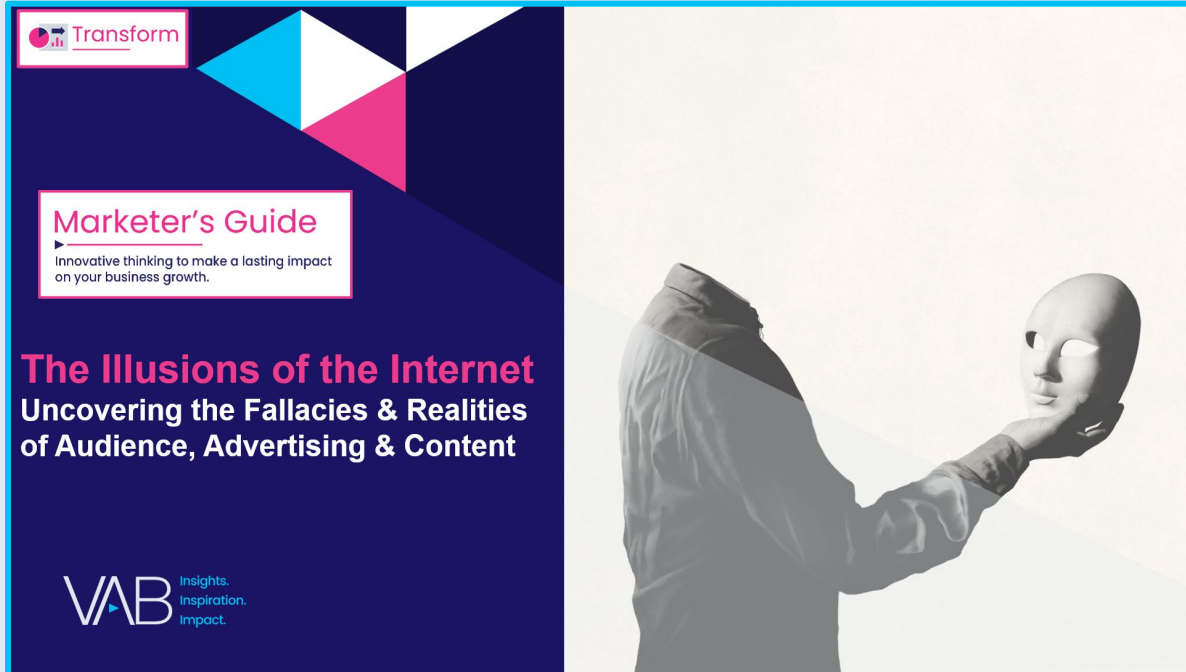
Insist on campaign transparency from all your video ad partners.

A graphic with a dark blue background and a light blue-to-cyan gradient triangle on the left containing the word "Trust" in white. The rest of the triangle is filled with a pattern of smaller triangles.

**Trust**

Trust multiscreen TV to always be fully transparent, accurate and accountable.

# Download our [full guide](#) to learn more about the realities of multiscreen TV's 'Premium Video Advantage' for marketers



**Transform**

**Marketer's Guide**  
Innovative thinking to make a lasting impact on your business growth.

**The Illusions of the Internet**  
Uncovering the Fallacies & Realities of Audience, Advertising & Content

**VAB** Insights. Inspiration. Impact.

## The Realities of Multiscreen TV's 'Premium Advantage' for Marketers

Uncovering 20 Realities Across the Four Main Components of the Internet

1 Audience How many people online are fake?	2 Advertising How much ad inventory is fake?	3 Products & Services How many products, services and ads online are fake?	4 Content How much online content is fake?
31% of internet traffic is non-human, 37% is 'bad bots'	\$44.8 billion is spent on 'undefined platforms' through Google	72% of adults have experienced at least one online scam or attack	338M videos removed from YouTube for spam, misleading and scams
One in 10 Instagram accounts are fake (93 Million bots)	Over \$7 out of every \$5 spent on digital ads is fraudulent	\$1.9B in consumer losses from social media scams in 2024	Although difficult to quantify, the internet has been flooded by 'AI slop'
4.3 billion fake accounts were banned by Facebook in 2024	Social media is most vulnerable to fraud, says 59% of ad industry	70% of new FB & Insta advertisers were promoting scams or bad goods	33% of consumers believe they have been targeted by a deepfake scam
	26% of programmatic digital ad spend is on unproductive media	\$16 Billion of Meta's revenue came from scam ads and banned goods	\$1.7B estimated ad spend lost to 'Made-For-Advertising' sites in 2024
	One fraud led to 50MM mobile app downloads across 180 scam apps	21% of online counterfeit goods cases now start on social media	\$30B in lost U.S. revenue from piracy & illegal streaming
	45% of consumers have installed or used an ad blocker	TikTok Shop faces deluge of 70MM products that violated its terms	

**Multiscreen TV's 'Premium Advantage'**

- \$100+ Billion annual investment in truly premium video content
- 75% of all adults say they love watching TV and streaming content
- The #1 most trusted media platform by consumers
- Habitually reaches real, verified human audiences at scale every day
- Massive opportunities to reach real audiences in transparent media environments
- Advertising environment provides a 'halo effect' that uplifts brand reputation

PAGE 38 This information is exclusively provided to VAB members and qualified marketers

Click here to download 'The Illusions of the Internet'

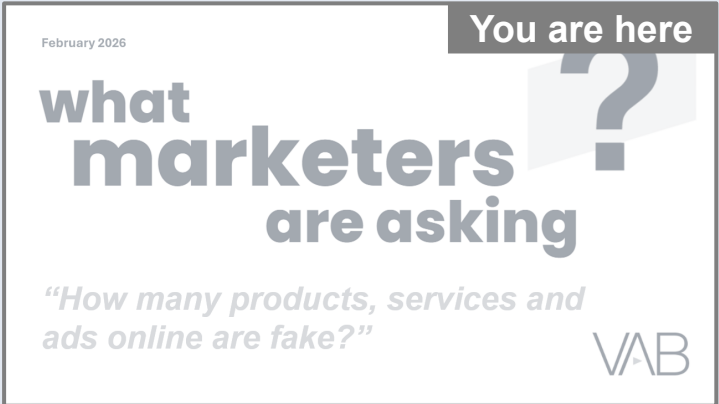
# Download our three other ‘What Marketers Are Asking’ reports based on [The Illusions of the Internet](#)



How many people online are fake?



How much ad inventory is fake?



How many products, services and ads online are fake?



How much online content is fake?

# About VAB

VAB plays a dual role in the video advertising industry. We are leading the change to bring about a more innovative and transparent marketplace. We also provide the insights and thought leadership that enables marketers to develop business-driving marketing strategies.

Drawing on our marketing expertise, we **simplify** the complexities in our industry and **discover** new insights that **transform** the way marketers look at their media strategy.



We are committed to your business growth and proud to offer VAB members, brand marketers and agencies ***complimentary access*** to our continuously-growing Insights library. **Get immediate access at [theVAB.com](https://theVAB.com).**

