

India's Secret Army of Online Ad 'clickers'

NEW DELHI: With her baby on her lap, Maya Sharma (name changed) gets down to work every evening from her eighth-floor flat at Vasant Vihar. Maya's job is to click on online advertisements. She doesn't care about the ads, but diligently keeps count — it's \$0.18 to \$0.25 per click.

A growing number of housewives, college graduates, and even working professionals across metropolitan cities are rushing to click paid Internet ads to make \$100 to \$200 (up to Rs 9,000) per month.

"It's boring, but it is extra money for a couple of hours of clicking weblinks every day," says a resident of Delhi's Patparganj, who has kept a \$300-target for the summer.

Traffic to click overseas Internet ads — from home loans to insurance — is spreading fast in India. "I have no interest in what appears when clicking an ad. I care only whether to pause 60 seconds or 90 seconds, as money is credited if you stay online for a fixed time," says another user.

Here's how it works: online advertisers in developed markets agree to pay hosting website each time an ad is clicked. With performance-based deals becoming dominant on the Internet, intermediaries have sprung up to "do the needful". Why, type in 'earn rupees clicking ads' in Google — you get 25,000 results.

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The trend is catching up in India. Says Goutam Rakshit, chairman, Advertising Council of India: "It's a numbers game as far as media buying is concerned. And anybody who can manipulate numbers gets the edge. This is unethical, and needs to be curbed." Take Click2freemoney.com. Calling itself an Internet advertising company that shares profits with members, it gives three options to

earn money — by clicking on website links via e-mails that they send, by clicking on banners and text ads in their paid-to-click section, and by referring others to the website.

No wonder Internet ad firms have been floated in neighbourhood colonies, promising to share "secrets" to earning in dollars by clicking online ads for an upfront fee of Rs 250 to Rs 1,500.

Typically, online ad clickers get their money remitted by opening accounts through PayPal or StormPay — which enables money transaction if you have an e-mail address.

Most clickers, however, opt to pay commission to middle men and encash earnings in rupees. Clickers say they pay \$7 commission for every \$50 earned.

Clicks are bought to boost number of hits for web ads or online advertisers who are not tracking user location. Rakshit says new tech solutions are being developed to bring in some sort of accountability. "It is going to be a cat-and-mouse game," he says.

Industry, as a whole, is confident that this is an interim trend that will fizzle out in the long run. But for the moment, there are countless Maya Sharmas clicking away. - Source: *The Times of India*, May 03, 2004



Many Paid clickers are making as much as \$200, or Rs 9,000, a month for their services

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