

affiliate program compliance guide

introduction

Maintaining a high quality affiliate program is about creating a fair and transparent environment for all partners. Most affiliates operate in good faith, but just as with any marketing channel, ongoing checks and clear processes are needed to ensure program integrity. By focusing on compliance and quality control, advertisers can protect their brand, ensure fair rewards for affiliates, and deliver reliable results. This framework outlines the key measures every program should adopt to maintain consistency, uphold standards, and build long-term trust within the affiliate channel.

This guide also provides clear definitions of key terms used throughout:

Compliance: Affiliates promoting advertising campaigns in accordance with the standards and Terms & Conditions as stipulated by Affiliate Networks/Agencies and their Advertisers.

Auditing: Checks aimed at verifying the quality and compliance of Affiliate/Publisher activity and advertising campaigns.

This guide outlines the key measures every program should adopt to maintain consistency, uphold standards, and build long term trust within the affiliate channel.

1. Preventing non compliant activity

1.1 Screen affiliate applications thoroughly

All affiliate applications should undergo a structured review to confirm their suitability.

Recommended checks include:

- > Confirm that traffic sources and websites load correctly.
- > Assess whether website content is relevant to your industry or vertical.
- > Verify accurate categorisation of the affiliate's website.
- > Analyse traffic levels, audience size, and social media presence.
- > Confirm that declared promotional methods comply with your program terms and conditions.

Applications that do not meet these requirements should be declined or placed on hold pending additional information.

1.2 Program Terms & Conditions

Clear and comprehensive Terms & Conditions (T&Cs) are the foundation of every compliant affiliate program. They define expectations for affiliates, establish acceptable promotional methods, and provide a legal and operational framework for managing potential breaches. Well structured T&Cs not only protect your brand but also create transparency and consistency across all partners.

T&Cs should clearly outline:

- > *Permitted and prohibited activities: such as the use of voucher codes, paid search, or brand bidding.*
- > *Disclosure and compliance obligations: particularly where regulatory or advertising standards apply.*
- > *Consequences of non compliance such as transaction voids, payment withholding, or program removal.*
- > *Dispute and escalation processes: ensuring fairness and accountability.*

Advertisers are strongly encouraged to review and update T&Cs regularly especially when launching new campaigns, entering new markets, or introducing new partners, to ensure they remain current with both platform policies and industry regulations.

1.3 Ongoing monitoring of active affiliates

Continuous monitoring is essential, particularly for affiliates generating conversions.

Review:

- > *Declared traffic sources and audience engagement metrics.*
- > *Referring URLs and other traffic source data in transaction reports.*
- > *Country of origin for conversions and associated IP addresses.*
- > *Sudden spikes in conversions or traffic.*
- > *Uncharacteristically high order values or conversion rates.*
- > *High void rate*

1.4 Transaction validation

All transactions must be validated against your own order database on a recurring schedule (at least monthly). Validation ensures that fraudulent or invalid transactions are detected and addressed promptly. API's are available across platforms to enable full automation and some plugins also validate automatically with affiliate platforms.

For further guidance, refer to the IAB Australia Affiliate & Partnership Marketing Working Group's comprehensive guide on [Affiliate Marketing Commission Validation Recommended Practices for 2025](#).

1.5 Direct communication with affiliates

Where activity appears suspicious, contact the affiliate directly to request details on their promotional methods. Request links, screenshots, and evidence of placement. This should be treated as a compliance check and documented. Where possible, allow affiliates a reasonable time frame to respond to compliance queries and make corrections. This tolerance helps avoid unnecessary disruption and encourages collaboration.

1.6 Formalise a monitoring routine

A defined routine should be established that includes:

- > *Affiliate application reviews.*
- > *Traffic and conversion monitoring.*
- > *Regular transaction validation.*
- > *Additional checks on new high-performing affiliates.*
- > *Understanding affiliate types and partners who promote your brand*
- > *Utilising the network tools available*

2. Identifying potential non-compliant activity

2.1 Typical compliance breaches

Key compliance risks include:

- > *Violations of program terms (e.g. misuse of coupon or paid search policies).*
- > *Use of SPAM, malware, toolbars, or cookie stuffing.*
- > *False or misleading advertising practices.*
- > *Criminal activities such as purchases made using stolen credit cards.*

If operating in a regulated sector (such as financial services or utilities), apply additional scrutiny to ensure compliance with licensing and regulatory requirements.

2.2 Indicators of suspicious activity

Investigate where the following patterns appear:

T&Cs should clearly outline:

- > *Unusually high transaction values.*
- > *Unusually high conversion rate*
- > *Multiple orders of identical value within a short period.*
- > *Multiple orders originating from the same IP address or click date and time.*
- > *Significant, unexplained performance spikes compared with historical data.*

Note: High-value transactions or performance spikes should not automatically be assumed to be fraudulent. Investigations should include verification of order IDs and customer details against back-end data.

3. Compliance breach response process

3.1 Confirmed breach

Where there is clear evidence of a compliance breach:

- > *Gather documented evidence (screenshots, URLs, and data reports).*
- > *Escalate to your affiliate platform for further action*
- > *Issue notice of removal or corrective action to the affiliate, as outlined in your program's terms and conditions*
- > *Void any affected transactions and apply sanctions where necessary.*

Clearly outline warnings and potential penalties upfront, such as suspension from the program, withholding or cancelling commission payments, or permanent removal and communicate these to affiliates in advance.

When removal is necessary, provide reasonable notice to affiliates and explain the reasons for removal.

4. Establishing a strong compliance culture

Maintaining program integrity requires a structured compliance framework, which should include:

- > *Clearly defined program terms and conditions.*
- > *Mandatory visibility of affiliate promotional methods.*
- > *Regular compliance checks and validation cycles.*
Documented processes for detection, escalation, and enforcement.
- > *Knowing your affiliates.*

conclusion

Quality control and compliance should be seen as an essential part of running a successful affiliate program. Clear standards, transparent processes, and consistent monitoring help protect both advertisers and affiliates, while also building stronger, more trusted partnerships. By embedding these practices into day-to-day management, programs can operate with confidence, reduce risk, and create sustainable growth across the affiliate channel.

These guidelines have been developed by the IAB Australia Affiliate and Partnership Working Group comprising representatives from Afterpay, Are Media, Commission Factory, Future, Impact, ND Agency, News Corp Australia, Nine, Partnerize, Rakuten and Skimlinks. Visit the IAB Australia website for more information on the [Affiliate and Partnership Working Group](#).