

Kickbacks.ai: An Ad in Your Claude Code Spinner That Pays You to Wait

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Andrew McCalip’s company ShiftKeys built [Kickbacks.ai](#), a VS Code extension that sells the word your coding assistant shows while it works. When Claude Code or Codex is busy, it normally prints a random verb like “Discombobulating...”. Kickbacks swaps that for a short, clickable sponsored line capped at 60 characters, and pays you an estimated 50% of the ad revenue for each five-second view. Advertisers bid for the slot in a live auction, from about

\$0.50 per 1,000 views. Your balance ticks up in the editor's status bar, and you cash out through Stripe once you pass \$10. The company says it has [paid developers \\$121,597](#), with an example month near \$40.

The clever part is also the risky part. To place the ad, the extension rewrites your Claude Code or Codex install in place, and tucks your sign-in token into your operating system's keychain. You sideload it, installing a downloaded file from the command line, not from the vetted VS Code Marketplace. One developer reading the [public source](#) noted it checks for updates every 90 seconds with no signature check, so a bad update could reach everyone fast. That is a lot to trust for a spinner.

This is becoming a small category, not a one-off, with copycats like IdleAds and Bacon pitching the same deal. Each asks you to let ad software modify the AI tools you code with, the exact supply-chain surface that scanners like [NVIDIA's SkillSpector](#) exist to check.

Read More: [ClawHub and the risk hiding in the agent-skills supply chain](#).

Sources:

- [Kickbacks.ai](#)
- [How Kickbacks works and pays out](#)
- [Kickbacks FAQ and fraud ground rules](#)
- [Kickbacks extension source \(read-only mirror\)](#)
- [Hacker News discussion](#)

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