

The publisher marketplace: finding hope in a cookieless world

The tracking cookie is withering away, leaving an increasingly cookieless world in its wake. These tiny text files empower advertisers with myriad data on the online consumers they intend to reach. However, they also violate privacy standards that have continually grown tighter and more respectful toward individual users. In a privacy-centric world where advertisers seek to maintain the upper hand on consumer insight, how can we move on from the cookie?

Two words: contextual targeting. Wait, three more words: buy ads directly. Instead of relying on third-party data acquired by cookies, the advertising ecosystem will need to shift toward being primarily informed by context and permissioned first-party data. If media buyers can cultivate more direct relationships with publishers, they'll remain in control of their targeting destinies.

Wait! Why are cookies going away?

By the time Google phases out cookie usage on Chrome in 2022, all major internet browsers aside from Microsoft Edge will have rid themselves of the tools now commonly, and rightly, perceived as privacy nightmares.

The real impetus for the downfall of the cookie, a tool which had long been utilised for tracking user journeys through the Web, seems to be that users were never quite clued in. Third-party cookies — as opposed to first-party cookies, which are only used internally by the website you're visiting to improve its services — are like silent worker bees, buzzing in the backend of your browser and collecting your data for outside entities like pollen for the hive. The hive they're returning to, in the case of this metaphor, is a third-party server.

Before major legislation like GDPR and swings in consumer sentiment over the last few years, most users had no idea what data they were freely giving out, how it was being used or who was able to access it. They weren't being given clear opt-out abilities or information about when cookies were present.

And now, under the weight of global privacy concerns, the third-party cookie is almost finished crumbling.

Okay. What are our options moving forward?

This is not the end of the world for our friends in Adtech. They are already hard at work on solutions that will favour both consumer privacy and advertiser capabilities.

But while you might expect these solutions to be leaps forward, as the tech industry tends to praise, audience targeting might need us all to first reflect on the past — return to a time when direct buy ads from publishers were the norm. Programmatic has given advertisers the ability to scale campaigns to enormous heights while allowing for deep targeting and measuring of specific audiences. However, data has always been the key to success in the long term.

Consented first-party data

David Temkin, Google's Director of Product Management, Ads Privacy and Trust, says first-party data collection should be every brand's first priority:

“Developing strong relationships with customers has always been critical for brands to build a successful business, and this becomes even more vital in a privacy-first world. [Google] will continue to support first-party relationships on our ad platforms for partners, in which they have direct connections with their own customers. And we’ll deepen our support for solutions that build on these direct relationships between consumers and the brands and publishers they engage with.”

Cookieless tracking alternatives

Google also voiced their support for developing alternatives to tracking. IAB recently released a *report detailing contextual advertising’s role* in the cookieless future. The report painted a picture of three emerging methods for reaching audiences.

Contextual targeting: With a foundation in segmentation spawned from first-party data sets and bolstered by predictive models driven by machine learning, brands and publishers can use context to enhance the reception of their ads based on external targeting factors. Essentially, publishers can utilize technology to understand how a user will interact with an ad based on the context in which they are seeing it. This can get incredibly specific and extend beyond the device, too — for example, ads could be created and targeted based on anticipated or real-time weather patterns.

Universal IDs: A smaller portion of audiences could be captured with universal IDs, which are identifiers that create a shared identity for a user across the sites they visit. These consented IDs are deterministic, meaning they are clearly identifiable because they are built on authenticated or inferred first-party and offline data.

Cohorts: Aggregated segments that share specific similarities across events and time are collected into cohorts, which are part of *another tactic behind which Google has thrown their weight*. Going above and beyond basic segmentation like demographics (e.g. age or gender), cohorts align users who share life experiences that differentiate them and provide a deeper connection to a more useful targeting group, especially for niche audiences. An example might be women between the ages of 35 and 50 who served as pilots in the United States Air Force.

Collecting first-party data is a good start and now, we have a sense of the road ahead for building on that first-party data. But with cookieless tracking, how can media buyers truly know that they’re reaching their audiences in the most effective settings and for the best value? This is where publisher direct buys make an unexpected but welcome return to the spotlight.

The publisher marketplace

With first-party data taking over as the top driver of audience insight, publishers capture specific audiences, gain the consent of their users and offer stellar, highly specified audience segments to advertisers.

Direct buy ads from publishers offer several advantages which Alex Harris, seasoned media buyer, explained in detail. One important advantage to reiterate is the ability to improve creative design for greater impact, memorability and relatability. When you're reaching smaller portions of a larger audience based within a specific publisher, you can tailor your creatives to that segment. This means you can be more deliberate and effective in your campaigns, minimising spend waste, and increasing the conversions and KPIs you're prioritising.

To help marketers facilitate direct relationships with publishers, [BriefBid](#) created a collaborative digital media marketplace for direct buys. The marketplace allows marketers to discover niche media properties, access the latest media kits and communicate directly with publishers.

The goal of the publisher marketplace is to consolidate fragmented sources of information and help marketers make the most informed decision for their ad spend.

With a publisher marketplace that gives you the power to connect directly with thousands of premium publishers, and through them, millions of engaged audience members, you'll be ready to conquer the cookieless world.