The future of digital advertising in a cookieless world

Maddyness spoke to Geoffroy Martin, CEO of Ogury about the future of digital advertising in a cookieless world and the difference between personified and personalised advertising.

You advocate for the concept of personified advertising, as opposed to personalised advertising. Can you explain the difference?

There is no doubt that the digital advertising industry is shifting towards a cookieless and IDless model. But many players are still intent on ignoring the inevitable, insisting on using discredited personalised advertising in the mistaken belief that it will continue to stand a chance.

However, if you really think it through, the _ultra-personalisation_ which stems from 1-to-1 marketing is a perversion of the internet that was made possible by third-party cookies. As it stands today, ad tracking has become socially unacceptable – with an ever-increasing number of users loudly rejecting it. And advertisers don't care about targeting a few individuals only anymore – except for ultra-targeted bottom-of-funnel campaigns – but about reaching 100,000 or 200,000 people with the same characteristics.

This is what we offer thanks to a targeting technology that is based on personas rather than users' identities, and on the destinations where these personas consume content instead of the individual users themselves. We have called this technology personified advertising, in opposition to personalised advertising. For us, it is the only future-proof way to allow advertisers to reach their consumers at scale while respecting their privacy.

Nevertheless, more and more cookieless solutions are emerging on the market.

Yes, indeed. But brands are actually having a hard time choosing among the many options available. Between unified IDs, contextual, semantic, or cohorts-based targeting, switching to technologies that are completely independent of cookies and IDs is not that clear cut.

As a matter of fact, we recently conducted a _global survey_ on 1,000 major brand and media agency executives to get their perspective on the future of digital advertising in a cookieless world. The survey found that 60% of the polled executives believe user tracking to be a source of reputational risk for brands, and 56% of them think cookies and IDs represent a threat to user privacy. Still, over 41% of respondents are not familiar with targeting technologies that are independent of advertising identifiers.

This shows there is a significant lack of awareness surrounding cookieless technologies, as they tend to be complicated to comprehend from an advertiser's perspective. And this is understandable as these solutions aren't yet the norm in our industry.

Then how can advertisers navigate through these new solutions that seek to replace cookies?

Contextual and semantic targeting have been the industry's go-to alternatives to cookies and IDs. But they only go so far in effectively reaching users as they try to predict who is looking at a page or app based on the context of that same page instead of users' specific interests. With more ambitious goals, cohort-based advertising goes one step further. It collects users' browsing history on sites and apps to analyse their behaviour and identify general topics, capturing collective trends at a broader level. But using cohorts implies gathering user data without them being fully aware of it – which can be perceived as invasive.

Many unified ID solutions have also emerged in these last few years. While they might seem like a great alternative, they lack the cookies' scalability. They are siloed, can't be interoperable, and require user consent – which is more and more difficult to get as they reject online tracking. Unified IDs also rely on a specific network of publishers who refuse to share user data, making their reach extremely limited and not fit for purpose.

In contrast, personified advertising never tracks an individual's online behaviour. Instead, it looks at the destinations where personas are likely to access their content – at scale.

In practical terms, how do you qualify these destinations?

Our model was seeded on foundational data aggregated from more than 2 billion phones and collected with explicit user consent between 2014 and 2020. The insights derived from this data are regularly enriched and updated through surveys distributed to large user panels.

Thanks to them, Ogury collected 20 million data points in 2022 and plans to reach the 40 million mark in 2023. This data is then refined using contextual and semantic targeting (which, alone, are not enough to really understand an audience), as well as delivery and performance data from ongoing campaigns.

Before joining Ogury, you were leading Criteo's retail media department. What do you think about the explosion of retail media investments?

That's right. And if I chose to leave Criteo at such an exciting time for retail media, it is because I was convinced there were even greater things to be done at Ogury around the future of cookieless advertising.

The hype surrounding retail media is just one part of the industry's evolution and investments in online advertising. So far, this evolution has consisted of four digital advertising waves, intricately linked to consumer behaviour at a particular moment in time. The first was that of search advertising, followed by social media. The third wave, which started several years ago, has undoubtedly been retail media. However, the fourth and arguably most important wave is right around the corner. It takes the shape of IDless and cookieless digital advertising and will reshuffle the cards in our industry like never before.

This latest wave is unstoppable due to Internet users' rejection of advertising tracking en masse, and the tightening digital ad regulations that have resulted from it. Personified advertising is now emerging as the solution the industry has been so desperately crying out for as we head into a privacy-first future, and this new wave of advertising.

Geoffroy Martin is the CEO of _Ogury_.

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