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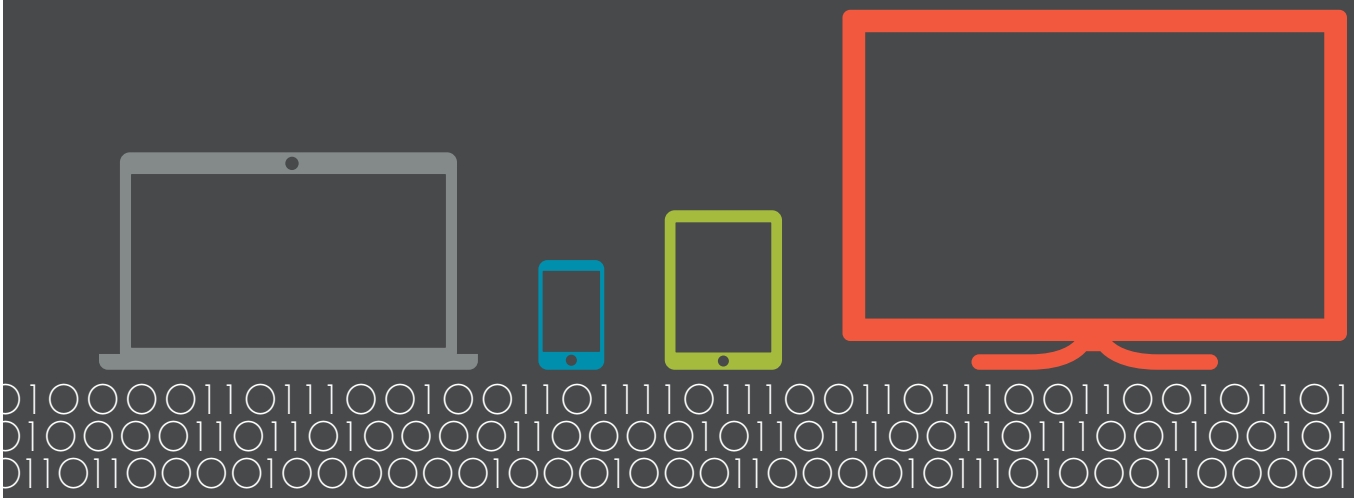
playbook:

Cross-Channel Data



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introduction

It's a Fragmented World

As consumers of digital media, the connected device revolution has been a wonder, giving users the ability to experience the entire Internet virtually whenever, wherever and on whatever they choose.

For digital publishers, it's been a bit more of a pain.

Publisher audiences are consuming content on a wealth of devices: desktop, smartphones, tablets, over-the-top devices, video game consoles, even watches. Currently, NPD estimates that the average U.S. household boasts 5.7 connected devices. Cisco estimates that the majority of US individuals will have five connected devices for every consumer by 2017.

Device fragmentation has had a complicated effect on publisher efforts to understand and target their audiences. Where once a publisher could easily track user behavior and deliver targeted advertising across a site—or network of sites—with the help of HTTP cookies, that tool is virtually useless outside web browsers. The same person may appear as three different users when they access publisher content through desktop Internet, a smartphone or a tablet.

However, the tools exist to track users across devices and leverage this insight for advertising purposes, but it's a more complicated process than firing a pixel or embracing a user-ID system.

This is a thrilling time—never before could publishers track and interpret their audiences seamlessly across numerous digital platforms, and then deliver relevant cross-channel experiences (that notably have a bottom line impact). Never before could advertisers offer such cohesive messaging to their customers at scale from one device to the next.

Advancing audience knowledge across channels will increase spend on burgeoning channels (namely mobile) as advertisers have pledged they would spend more on if they could demonstrate ROI. The road there requires showing advertisers the audiences they desire in a language they understand, in terminology they can analyze against both online and offline channels.

This playbook aims to bolster your understanding of cross-channel data by offering an in-depth look into deterministic and probabilistic identifiers, as well as how they can be matched across walled gardens. We'll also examine the tools used in cross-channel audience behavior analysis and how advertisers can take advantage, particularly when it comes to emerging channels. Finally, we'll dive into privacy concerns around cross-channel data collection and analysis.

02 what's a playbook?

A playbook is an extension of what the AdMonsters community has been doing at our conferences for more than 14 years. A playbook solidifies what has made our events "must attend" for many digital strategists. By bringing people together to share learnings and best practices in a focused way, people can create a plan and avoid hours—if not days—of doing research on their own.

The AdMonsters playbook concept takes existing AdMonsters content (from conferences and AdMonsters.com) and, with the help of the AdMonsters community, "crowd sources" a document that outlines best practices on a particular topic. Our belief is that this will allow for a free exchange of ideas with the benefit of curation for accuracy. This document does not get into specifics around individual solution providers intentionally.

Great effort has gone into writing the playbook in a fashion that applies to as many publishers as possible without becoming too general. In a technology-driven industry like digital advertising, information quickly becomes obsolete. The intention is that, based on the feedback of the AdMonsters community, the next version of this playbook will start to take shape and, with additional contributors, grow in both depth and breadth. Publication of future versions will be scheduled based upon the needs of the community.

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03 identify this

Alas, poor HTTP cookie—you served us well.

OK, that's a bit dramatic—while ad tech trades love to talk of the "cookie crumbling" (AdMonsters might have had an article or two along those lines...) HTTP cookies are not actually walking gently into that good night. They haven't even been rendered obsolete, but for tracking purposes, their use is pretty much limited to web browsers.

HTTP cookies were originally designed as a browser-based e-commerce tool for recalling items in a shopping cart. Cookies themselves are identifiers—text files stored in a browser, specific to that browser. A Chrome cookie means nothing to a Firefox cookie. A pixel on a website (typically a 1X1 transparent gif) is used to launch the cookie, as well as read and edit it.

Cookies do work on mobile browsers, but users prefer mobile applications, where cookies are useless as they were designed with browsers in mind. Once again, this does not mean the cookie is dead, but it is a limited identifier in an era where scale means cross-screen ability. At the same time, a cookie can be linked to the many identifiers developed for the fragmented landscape of today (and likely tomorrow).

These identifiers fall into two camps:

Deterministic Identifiers: Identifiers based on some kind of identifiable data: for example, a log-in to a site, behind which is likely a name and email address, and maybe some other information shared between user and collector (see sidebar on registration data). They also may include offline customer data or IDs. The point is that these IDs directly relate to specific users, though the ID itself is coded into a long string of integers to alleviate privacy concerns. Of course, privacy fears remain because theoretically the IDs could reveal personally identifiable information.

Some prominent examples:

- **Software-/platform-based IDs: Facebook, Google, Twitter.**
- **Mobile software IDs: Apple's IDFA and Google's Android ID**
- **Publisher-based IDs: Amazon, The Weather Company, AOL.**

Probabilistic Identifiers: These use a wide range of signals—sometimes hundreds—to build cross-channel user profiles. What kind of signals? Publicly available JavaScript commands, ad-serving data, piggybacked iFrames—information providers deem "innocuous." As an industry expert told AdMonsters, "If you started to take away the data that we use to do the probability-based ID, pages would not load, videos will not stream."

03 identify this

Basically probabilistic ID providers use software that analyzes all of these regularly occurring digital media signals (anything from current browser version to device type to country time zone to shared IP addresses) to build user profiles across platforms. Each one has their own special formula in constructing their IDs. Occasionally this process is called “fingerprinting,” though the term has a negative connotation and providers try to avoid it.

Unlike deterministic IDs, probabilistic IDs are typically not tied to hard identifying information (e.g., emails or customer IDs). Deterministic IDs like mobile software or platform IDs are sometimes though not always used as seed data in building the IDs (though probabilistic IDs can be matched with deterministic IDs). Ironically enough, providers try to skate around privacy concerns by highlighting their lack of veracity, hence the name “probabilistic ID.” Companies worth their salt boast 70% to 95% accuracy rates (based on comparisons to deterministic IDs).

Though not as precise as deterministic IDs, the probabilistic method offers a scalable way to map out user behaviors across devices with limited to no reliance on PII. Profiles can be built that unify users across platforms, applications and even operating systems. Finally, the probabilistic technology features learning algorithms that grow more accurate over time.

Sidebar:

First-, Second- and Third-Party Data

First-Party Data:
Data collected and stored by the publisher or advertiser themselves. This could include registration data; on-site browsing, search, destination and purchasing information; or even CRM or other offline data.

Second-Party Data:
First-party data shared between two parties: for example, data-matching between a publisher and advertiser.

Third-Party Data:
Non-exclusive data collected and aggregated by a service provider or tech company, which also stores and sells it. The data could be demographics, search, interest or intent data.

Sidebar: The Power of Registration Data

First-party data is an extremely valuable asset for publishers, but arguably the most powerful variety is registration or log-in data. If you encourage a user to log in on all their devices, you're presented with a cross-channel picture of their behavior and can target them specifically wherever and whenever.

But it goes beyond just tracking—especially with video, advertisers want to buy digital advertising in a manner similar to television, targeting demographics that correspond to gross ratings points. These can then be compared against offline campaign performance (most notably linear television). Brands use GRPs to measure how campaigns actually move items off shelves.

The demographic data in question is age and gender, long the dynamic duo of TV advertising. So if publishers, app developers and other digital content providers can get users to share age and gender, it can be tied to user IDs, which makes understanding cross-channel demographics easier as well as targeting. This can be quite a boon for increasing advertiser spend—you're giving the clients exactly what they want.

Publishers increasingly are trying to encourage user log-ins through incentives—exclusive content, editorial suggestions, customized layouts, access to commenting boards, etc. These log-ins can also be enabled through social platforms like Facebook or Twitter. These services act as intermediary in asking for permission and recovering the data. (In exchange, they grab a bit of interest data). Ops should collaborate with other divisions (e.g., analytics, editorial) to demonstrate the value of log-ins for the entire company.

04 walled gardens & ID matching

Remember earlier we mentioned that cookies could only be read and edited by the first-party that launched them? Deterministic IDs have a similar issue. When different sites, platforms, mobile operating systems and tech providers track and target using proprietary deterministic ID systems, they can't interpret each others' IDs. The same person on Facebook and Amazon might register as two different users to an advertiser.

This is a conundrum known as "walled gardens"—basically, deterministic IDs can almost only be used to target and understand the audience on the platform or publisher ecosystem where it is native. The ID facilitator could also use its IDs for audience extension or retargeting users on third-party locales (e.g., websites, mobile apps).

Walled gardens aren't terrible: first and foremost, they bolster data privacy by not sharing. However, for a deterministic ID to scale, the provider must have a huge audience—e.g., Facebook, Amazon, Apple iOS. Then advertisers are rightly wary about putting most of their spend through a single platform or ecosystem—they want to diversify and meet their audience in a variety of places. Relying on deterministic IDs, they could be reaching the same audience on multiple publishers and applications and have no way of knowing. Publishers, on the other hand, are nervous about working with a single platform's ID because it may limit advertiser spend and these platforms have ulterior revenue motives that can create conflicts of interest.

Matching deterministic IDs is a key practice in de-duplicating data and identifiers within a DMP or CRM system. Linking is accomplished by finding a common key, an exact match between two data components. This works great on a small scale, within a closed system where specific business rules can pinpoint components or unique identifiers.

Unfortunately, the process of matching proprietary deterministic IDs is not as easy or widespread as cookie syncing, which enables scalable programmatic targeting between DSPs and SSPs on desktop Internet. In that case, SSP cookies are passed back through JavaScript during RTB-enabled transactions, and can be passively read and matched by DSPs. Identifiers cannot simply be passed back—they must be purposefully shared.

Enter second-party data—two companies (could be advertiser to publisher, publisher to publisher, advertiser to advertiser and so forth) use a neutral service provider (typically a DMP) as a mixing bowl to mash up their IDs and create new ones.

Even here, a little probabilistic matching goes a long way in tying together IDs. Instead of finding an exact match, a host of fields are compared between two IDs. The similarities are then analyzed against the weighting of the various fields. Not precise, but with the right recipe, probabilistic matching can get pretty close.

Hence, a smart strategy will put both deterministic and probabilistic methods to work in building cross-channel user profiles. Instead of creating "universal IDs," providers will build graphs that link together users' disparate IDs across channels and devices.

Next is putting these graphs into action.

04 walled gardens & ID matching

If most of these digital identifiers are nothing more than a series of integers, where's the beef? Or rather, the actual data associated with the IDs? Elsewhere, potentially in a CRM, a DMP or a data warehouse. These identifiers only mean something to the company (advertiser, publisher, platform) that launched them.

Handy Terminology:

CRM: Customer Relationship Management is a strategy that leverages data management to oversee interactions (sales, marketing, customer service) with current and potential customers. A CRM system is the technology that facilitates this practice.

DMP: A Data Management Platform is a comprehensive tool enabling data collection, de-duplication, centralization, classification, indexing as well as the ability to pump in third-party and offline data and build lookalike modeling.

PII: Personally Identifiable Information, or any piece of data that could identify a specific person. This includes names, addresses, emails, social media accounts, etc., though definitions of PII differ from company to company.

Hashing: Transforming character strings (like IDs) into shorter values or keys that link to the original string.

Inferred Data: Information about a user based on educated guesses and reasonable deductions—for example, if you enjoy reading articles about Ferraris, you could be labeled an auto enthusiast.

Declared Data: Information shared by the user—for example, if you provided your age and gender to register for a site or service.

Demographics: Data that represent specific sections of a population, typically based on characteristics like gender, age, marital status, number of children, race, income, etc. For TV and digital video advertisers, age and gender are must-haves.

GRP: Gross Ratings Point, or the percentage of the target audience reached by the frequency an ad is seen in a specific campaign.

05 the modern ROI equation

Here's a crazy idea—brands actually want to see a return on their advertising investment. Who woulda thunk?

As the digital advertising space has matured, the prominence of clicks and impressions, once highly vaunted metrics, has dimmed. Advertisers are interested in buying audiences, not publishers and platforms. In using programmatic channels like the open marketplace, they may not even know which publisher is serving the ad.

Data is key to identifying audience, whether it's brands using first-party data to track down their customers or entrusting digital publishers and platforms and verifying demographics through a third-party monitor.

Digital might be the most measurable medium, but the multitude of metrics can be grouped into two key areas that in turn add up to return on investment:

Campaign Delivery + Brand/Sales Effect = Digital Advertising ROI

Publishers ops plays a huge role on the campaign delivery side, ensuring the creative is:

- **reaching actual humans rather than spiders or bots**
- **viewable (MRC standard or negotiated terms and conditions)**
- **hitting the intended target audience (typically demographic-based)**
- **hitting a certain frequency within target audiences (gross rating points - GRPs)**

Although cross-channel audience knowledge is important for the first two points, it's the latter two where it's essential.

06 cross-channel potential for advertisers

To better understand how to aid advertisers in campaign delivery, we need to examine what they actually desire (or should desire) from cross-channel advertising. Publishers can (and should) be an integral part of bringing these goals to fruition.

Accurate picture of audience and reach. As we've mentioned a few times, device fragmentation encourages user fragmentation—users may visit publisher property on multiple devices where tracking is siloed. In effect, one person might be counted as multiple users because they saw a campaign on several devices. Cross-channel user profiles provide a truer account of reach by de-duplicating audiences.

Frequency measurement. GRPs—the frequency a certain user group (typically, demographic-based) was exposed to a campaign—are highly important to advertisers. For one, they can be easily compared with offline channel performance like linear television. But they're also a tool long used by brands to determine marketing effectiveness across channels—brands have internal calculations that determine how much product GRPs actually move. Enabling user frequency measurement across channels will greatly aid advertisers in hitting GRPs, as well as help judge the effectiveness of multiple creatives on different segments and devices.

Justification for spend on emerging channels. Although they know their consumers are increasingly using mobile and other devices (e.g., connected TVs), advertisers have been reluctant to dedicate spend to these channels because they cannot demonstrate ROI. Cross-channel profiles (particularly with demographic information) allow for mobile audience measurement in a language advertisers can understand (or at least pump into their ROI calculations).

Discover new audiences. Let's say some of your high-value users primarily use your tablet app and rarely visit your desktop web property. Advertisers that avoided or limited mobile campaigns because of a lack of comparable metrics might have been missing out on key segments, and you've left revenue on the table. With cross-channel audience understanding, you can highlight users across screens and demonstrate their value.

Cohesive messaging. Cross-channel profiles enable advertisers to deliver unified, targeted messaging across channels and devices with control over frequency. They also enhance advertiser ability to plug the most effective creative format into the optimal channel for specific users—for example, a video ad on a tablet.

Sequential messaging. The next step, or really giant leap—cross-channel profiles and frequency tallies open the door for advertisers to deliver (and measure the performance of) series of targeted creative. Basically, this advances brand storytelling and audience engagement to a whole new level.

Attribution. Rather than rely on the infamous last click, cross-channel data analysis can potentially offer advertisers a much more accurate picture of the consumer path to purchase, or at least provide the insight necessary to fuel complex attribution models.

07 putting attention data to work

It's not enough to just launch identifiers and go hunting. Understanding how your audience is leveraging your products (e.g., sites, apps, OTT channels) is important not just for offering users better experience, but also judging the types of creative to deliver on each channel. Sequential advertising is worth nothing if you serve the wrong type of format on a channel. We take a look at the tools that make cross-channel user analysis and targeting a reality.

Basic Analytics

Before building cross-channel profiles, you should have a good understanding of how your audience is consuming your content and/or generally using your site, app or product. The obvious example is a sports publisher: audiences may watch highlight reels on desktop Internet, check scores on smartphones, stream games and matches on a tablet. Your analytics provider should give you a good sense of what content or activities are most popular by channel or device.

An analytics provider can also assist in the understanding of your web audience through analyzing traffic patterns in and out. Beyond that, number of pageviews per user, outbound traffic and geolocation based on IP addresses are key signals for getting a grip on your desktop Internet (and some mobile) audience. More advanced analytics solutions can even layer in audience insights through first- or third-party data—however, such services go beyond the scope of free analytics.

Probabilistic ID Providers

These companies will deploy their probabilistic identification technology (sometimes bolstered with first-party data or deterministic IDs) to break your audience into cross-device user profiles that you can use for both analysis and targeting. A simpler solution than a DMP, but one that offers far less control over segment-building and analysis.

Third-Party Consultants

As another less expensive and labor-/integration-heavy option to a DMP, third-party cross-channel data consultants will employ a mixture of first-party data and probabilistic identifiers (occasionally glazed with bits of deterministic IDs) to provide publishers with a better understanding of cross-channel advertiser behavior. They can also help with audience targeting on a campaign-by-campaign basis.

DMPs

Data management platforms offer publishers the ability to truly take control of their cross-channel audience efforts. A DMP not only collects data, but also centralizes, de-dupes, classifies and indexes them across channels. Providers employ both deterministic and probabilistic matching to develop cross-channel user profiles with new, unique IDs. In addition, DMPs enable piping in of third-party data, creation of second-party data segments, audience extension capabilities, advanced and customizable reporting, as well as machine learning over time to assist in audience insights.

While more expensive and labor-intensive than the other options detailed, ultimately DMPs put publishers at the helm of their cross-channel data efforts, offering an unparalleled level of functionality.

08 mobile & emerging channels

It's difficult to call mobile an emerging channel when it's been used for advertising for more than a decade. Still, mobile monetization has long been a thorn in publishers' sides—advertisers have been reticent to plunge spend into the channel due to the lack of audience measurement and comparable metrics. In effect, publishers have been not just losing desktop Internet traffic to mobile devices, but the revenue those desktop impressions brought in.

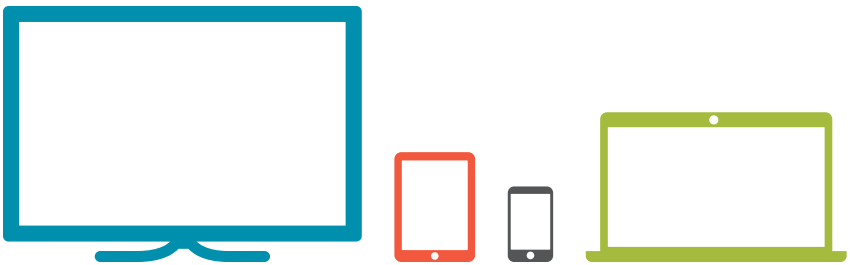
A few developments seem set to change the tide. The introduction of panel-based metrics and digital GRPs in mobile give advertisers the ability to verify they hit their target audiences on the channel. In addition, the rise of mobile programmatic has enabled advertisers to target their audiences in real time on the channel.

To take advantage of both of these trends—and potentially relieve themselves of their mobile monetization woes—publishers need cross-channel user profiles. Connecting mobile audiences with desktop will encourage cross-channel buys, and the campaigns can be delivered to the targeted demographics.

Programmatic has become quite a popular buying method for mobile and will only gain points with advanced targeting courtesy of cross-channel user profiles. In fact, advertisers have already shown an appreciation for mobile private exchanges, which offer priority access at a price.

Mobile monetization progress is a welcome sign as new digital channels are starting to gain steam—notably, over-the-top devices and/or connected TVs. A variety of publishers are launching content streams on these platforms that blur the line between TV and digital.

Measurement on this platform is in its early days, but there are a few advantages: registration data and probabilistic matching that incorporates IP addresses. Both of these can be used to bolster cross-channel profiles, offering advertisers incentive to work with in-the-know publishers on this burgeoning platform.



privacy

One-to-one marketing, a longtime dream of brands, is becoming a reality thanks to digital advertising technology. Unfortunately, that same technology is giving some consumers and their advocates privacy nightmares.

Let's think about it this way: if you see a person in a mall with a bag from Williams & Sonoma, you could infer that person likes to cook. You could be completely wrong—that person could be addicted to Seamless and the contents inside the bag are a present for a friend. Still, labeling that anonymous person as a "cooking enthusiast" is sorta reasonable and completely harmless.

The digital realm, as per normal, makes everything a lot more complicated. Instead of making an inference about what's in the bag, digital tracking technology pretty much noses through it to see the types of things the consumer purchased. In addition, he/she was followed around the online store to see what else was of interest, and will soon be receiving a slew of advertising based not only on the purchases but also the things viewed. In addition, that data might be co-referenced against another online store visit that was made on a different device.

In the offline world, such behavior would be invasive. Online, it may seem hard to argue that it's not a violation of privacy, but we'll give it a shot.

1. **Online, the user is anonymous. The trackers are chasing an ID that may be associated with PII, but that ID only means anything to the source that launched it. (Hence why walled gardens aren't completely terrible.) Hashing is used for emails, and the encryption would be hard to crack.**

2. **It's software doing the nosing, not a person. Software is incurious, just running a program or following orders. We're not talking Skynet or the Matrix—the machines are not self-aware.**

3. **The tracking is a tradeoff for the convenience of using the site. AdMonsters likes to call this the "unspoken handshake," though publishers are increasingly alerting their visitors to how cookies are used on-site.**

The term creepy still gets thrown around a lot with digital tracking. In fact, during the rise of ad blocking, a chief complaint was user annoyance with tracking. Do Not Track technology still lingers, though its execution has been complicated by device fragmentation. (What hasn't been?)

The thing is, tracking is essential for advertisers to calculate ROI. In linear television, audience is measured by using shifting control groups (households with Nielsen boxes) that serve as proxies for nationwide viewing. In digital, audience proxies aren't necessary—we can measure actual audience reach, after discounting non-human traffic and unviewable impressions. It's a great deal more precise than TV.

Offline data collection and targeting is a tightly regulated industry, with different allowances from state to state. The digital advertising industry has amazingly stayed afloat with mainly self-regulation for around 20 years, much to the chagrin of privacy advocates. However, the threat of the government bringing the hammer down—through the Federal Trade Commission or new legislation—is ever-present. It seems every year at least one consumer data privacy bill is submitted, and these tend to get a lot of congressional co-sponsors because "creepy" Internet trackers are easy targets.

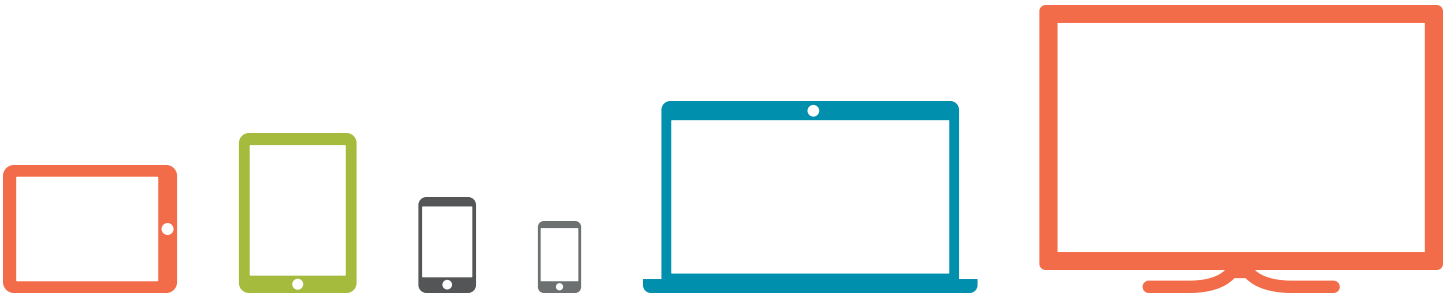
09 privacy

Cross-channel data management has raised the regulatory threat to new heights. There is great consumer concern that tracking through deterministic and especially probabilistic identifiers is “unblockable”—there is no way for consumer to opt out, especially on non-desktop devices. You can’t just clear your cookies anymore.

However, privacy services such as TRUSTe offer consumers the ability to opt out of tracking by some probabilistic identifiers. Browser add-ons can block canvas fingerprinting, a method of probabilistic identifier with a semi-deterministic aspect. And probabilistic has a strange blessing when it comes to privacy considerations because it is not exact. Even if sprinkled with deterministic elements, following a trail back to PII is awfully difficult.

The industry fears that the FTC will use its authority under Section 5(a) of the FTC Act to prohibit certain cross-channel data practices. That section allows the agency to block “unfair or deceptive acts or practices.” This statute has been used before in high-profile settlements around Flash Cookies and history sniffing. These cases, however, highlighted incidents where users were deceived in terms of the data companies were collecting. The argument that employing identifiers for cross-channel audience analysis willingly thwarts user wishes does not hold a lot of weight.

The threat to consumer data privacy from cross-channel data practices is more perceived than actual. All parties in digital media take a lot pains to protect their very valuable user data—they are a huge advantage in an overcrowded field. The key to relieving the perceived threat is educating both the consumer public and the regulators. Industry advocacy groups have the latter covered; publishers alerting users to their cookie policies are on the right path. Furthermore, they need to explain to their audience that deterministic IDs are unshared, proprietary property and that probabilistic IDs are basically highly, highly educated guesses.



10 summary: the fragmentation to come

Device fragmentation shows no sign of abating, particularly as media consumption continues an amazing climb. Estimates of the number of connected devices in the year 2020 ranges from 50 billion to 75 billion. We're talking watches, cars, dishwashers and beyond—the question for our industry is how many of those will feature media and advertising opportunities?

We hope this playbook has made it clear that there is no better time to get your cross-channel data ducks in a row. Take advantage of the flood of advertiser spend hitting digital channels, as it will ensure you are prepared—even ahead of the game—for the next batch of platforms and devices that consumers will flock to.

This means understanding the techniques around deterministic and probabilistic IDs, as well as what your advertisers are seeking from cross-channel efforts in terms of reach, messaging and even attribution. We hope you feel confident in finding technology providers that can enhance your efforts in discerning your audience across screens, and see how mobile audience knowledge is opening the doors for emerging channels.

Finally, acknowledge the contentions around consumer data privacy that are rocking the industry, and try to do your part in raising awareness of data practices.

about

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AdMonsters is the global leader in strategic insight on the future of digital media and advertising technology. Through our conferences, website, original research and consulting services, we offer unparalleled in-person experiences and unique, high-quality content focused on media operations, monetization, technology, strategy, platforms and trends. Founded in 1999, AdMonsters began serving the advertising operations professional through live media and its online community. We provided a forum to share best practices, explore new technology platforms and build relationships. Today's expanding ecosystem now includes publishers and content creators, agencies, SSPs, DMPs, DSPs, RTB and service providers, technology and platform developers, advertising networks, brands, and investors.

This vibrant community is forward-looking and results-oriented. Their success depends on strategic insights about technology and monetization, and the exchange of actionable peer-to-peer best practices. AdMonsters has built its reputation on providing objective editorial leadership based on deep, real-world expertise. We have continued to evolve our editorial strategy to address the changing needs of the market and as a result, AdMonsters has attracted a highly focused audience who are at the forefront of the industry, and leading marketing partners have found AdMonsters to be a powerful channel to reach these decision makers. Today, our portfolio of integrated media solutions includes industry leading live events, our innovative Connect content solutions, email marketing programs, and more.

As of March 2015, AdMonsters is part of the Access Intelligence family of companies.

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