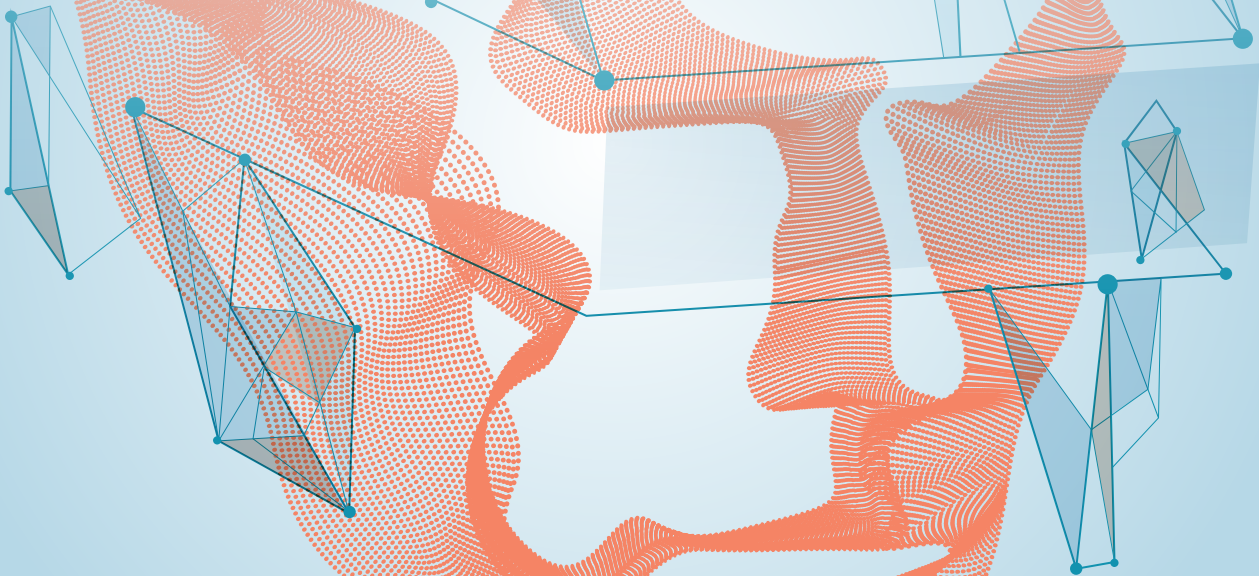**admonsters**

PLAYBOOK

Evolution of the Header

Sponsored by:

ge✷edge
Add Integrity

WHAT'S A PLAYBOOK?

A playbook is an extension of what the AdMonsters community has been doing at our conferences for 20 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 playbook will start to take shape and, with additional contributors, grow in both depth and breadth.

1. INTRODUCTION

We're long past the early, messy days of the header where publishers incorporated each and every demand partner right onto their page. The creation and standardization of header wrappers was a key development in the growth of programmatic, and this space has only become more organized over the years.

The popularity of the header forced Google to open up its ad server to direct SSP and exchange integrations, a product called Open Bidding that many publishers have adopted while maintaining robust headers. Indeed, publisher programmatic teams have become extremely strategic in their header deployments—header maintenance is one of the most important functions at a publisher with significant programmatic revenue.

As mature as the header seems, it is already being shaken up by the seismic changes rocking digital advertising. Most notably, the third-party cookie is scheduled to sunset in less than a year and a half, which will bring great changes to how advertisers purchase programmatically. In addition, the pandemic-driven ad-spend pause and a new wave of de-duping auctions and traffic shaping have all brought uncertainty to publishers' header management.
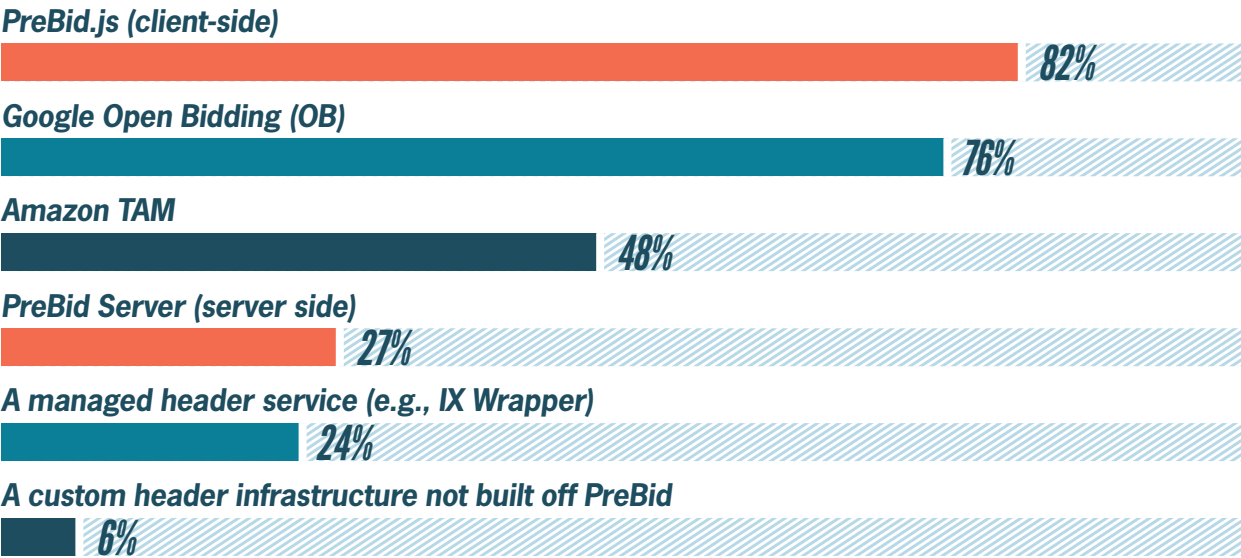
We decided now was a perfect time to survey publishers to understand their current header (and Open Bidding) setups while seeing what they were plotting for an ambiguous future. We asked 35 publishers of various sizes and content verticals to fill out an intense questionnaire, and the results were extremely illuminating.

2. CHIEF FINDINGS

- **PreBid.js** is unsurprisingly the most widely used header wrapper with **82%** of publishers. Only **27%** have integrated PreBid's server-side offering.

- **More than three-quarters** of the publishers surveyed use Google's Open Bidding (OB), which offers server-side auctions directly in Google Ad Manager. Those not using OB cited cost prohibitions and preference for the control of header wrappers.

- **Many publishers** used multiple wrappers to get access to Amazon's The Ad Marketplace in addition to other demand sources, but some also were balancing the benefits of client-side vs. server-side solutions.

- **Most publishers** are leveraging multiple integrations of demand partners across wrappers and OB—e.g., PubMatic in both PreBid.js and Google OB—to keep open as many supply paths as possible.

- **The median number of partners** in header integrations was between **8-10**, while those using OB tended between **7-9**.

- **Biggest challenges** with the header are a real mixed bag, from page latency to lack of development resources to make optimizations.

- **Despite an influx of malvertising** with the pandemic, only **39%** of respondents said they had seen an increase in low-quality advertising; **50%** said levels had stayed the same.

- **Only 15% of publishers** had noticed a change in their header and Open Bidding demand after The Trade Desks requested exchange partners de-duplicate auctions.

- **It doesn't look like headers** are getting less crowded any time soon. While **67%** of publishers said they planned to cut demand partners in the next six months… **64%** said they planned to add demand partners

3. SOLUTIONS

WHICH OF THESE HEADER/DEMAND SOLUTIONS DO YOU EMPLOY?

PreBid.js (client-side)
82%

Google Open Bidding (OB)
76%

Amazon TAM
48%

PreBid Server (server side)
27%

A managed header service (e.g., IX Wrapper)
24%

A custom header infrastructure not built off PreBid
6%

RESPONDENTS ALMOST UNIVERSALLY PRAISED

the amount of control and flexibility available in PreBid.js. All PreBid Server users and all Amazon TAM users were also leveraging PreBid.js.

We find that the industry moves so quickly that relying on a third party can handcuff us to how well the third party reacts to changes. We'd prefer to prioritize our own roadmaps depending on how we see the industry changing.

We have an ad library that manages GAM, Prebid, and TAM. That ad library has a UI we built internally that let's us turn bidders on and off, configure them and adjust their settings.

15% of respondents used a demand management tool within PreBid such as OpenWrap by PubMatic or Demand Manager by Magnite. These tools reportedly allow for more publisher control than an all-out managed wrapper like those provided by Index Exchange and Freestar, but at the same time provide services like bid-level analysis, consolidated reporting, and optimization. Indeed, all the publishers using these tools reported having limited development support and technical expertise.

IN A CLIENT-SIDE HEADER WRAPPER,

the auction(s) is conducted on the publisher's page within the browser. In a Server-side header wrapper—auction(s) is conducted on the server of the wrapper's host. This can potentially decrease latency, however ID-syncing rates have typically been well below those of the client-side.

DO YOU USE MORE THAN ONE HEADER WRAPPER?

NO 55%

YES 45%
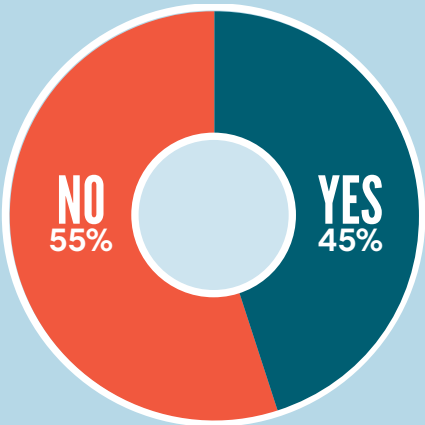
REASONS FOR USING MULTIPLE HEADER WRAPPERS:

- Maximize access to the buy side
- Access to unique demand sources (e.g., TAM)
- Receive benefits of both client-side and server-side wrappers in the header
- Ability to do A/B testing on demand partners; certain partners perform better through different integrations.
- Privacy regulation compliance issues
- Incremental revenue

OF THE 24% THAT DIDN'T USE OB:

27% Don't use GAM 360 ad serving product
36% Prefer control offered by header partners
18% Demand partner preferences
18% Other

OTHER INCLUDED:

- Currently in contract to on-board
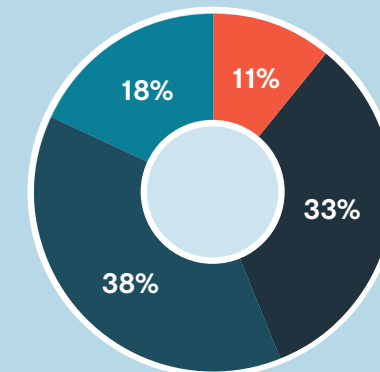- Using OB would preclude a precipitous rise in ad-serving fees.

4. DEMAND

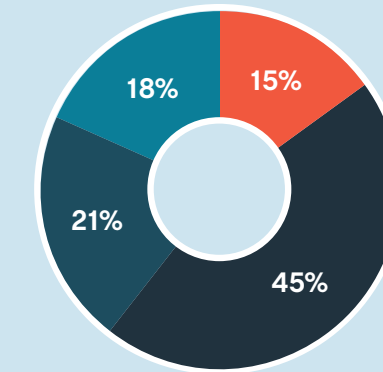### HOW MANY DEMAND PARTNERS ARE IN YOUR HEADER (CUMULATIVE)?

1-4	9%
5-7	18%
8-10	39%
10-12	12%
More than 12	18%
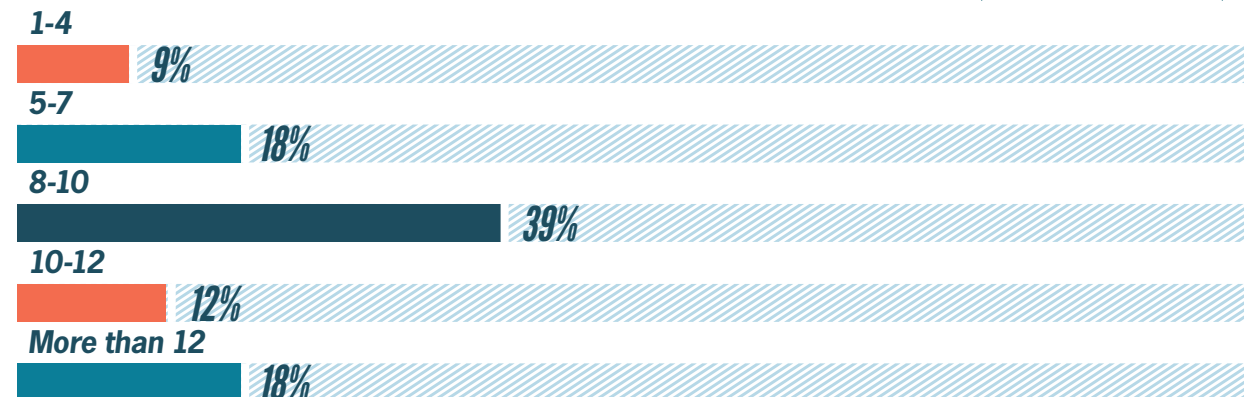
"TOO MANY!"

— response to "How many demand partners are in your header?"

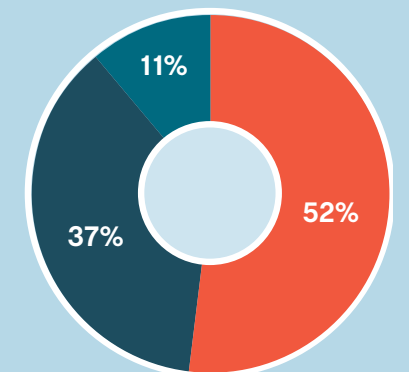### IF APPLICABLE, HOW MANY DEMAND PARTNERS ARE IN OB?

11%
33%
45% (38%)
18%

- 1–3 (11%)
- 4–6 (33%)
- 7–9 (38%)
- 10 or more (18%)

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PROGRAMMATIC REVENUE COMES THROUGH YOUR HEADER INTEGRATIONS?

15%
45%
21%
18%

- Less than 25% (15%)
- 26%–50% (45%)
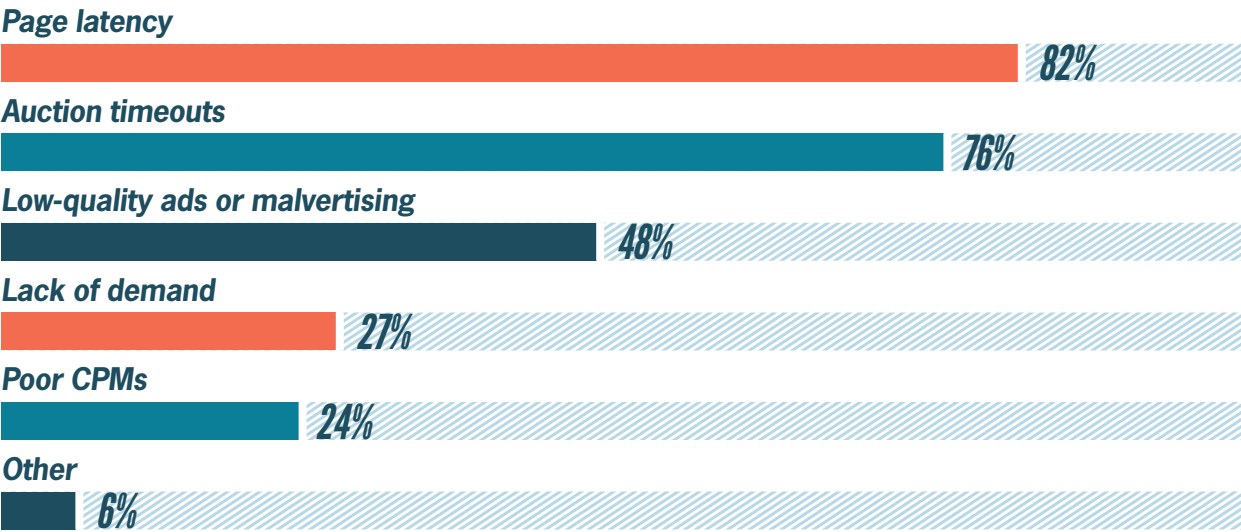- 51%–75% (21%)
- 76%–100% (18%)

### IF APPLICABLE, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR PROGRAMMATIC REVENUE COMES THROUGH OB?

11%
52%
37%

- Less than 25% (52%)
- 26%–50% (37%)
- 51%–75% (11%)

5. CHALLENGES

WHAT IS YOUR TOP CHALLENGE ASSOCIATED WITH THE HEADER?

Page latency
82%

Auction timeouts
76%

Low-quality ads or malvertising
48%

Lack of demand
27%

Poor CPMs
24%

Other
6%

Other includes:
- Lack of dev support to make optimizations
- PreBid updates
- Overall partner management
- General header maintenance
- Maintaining clear supply paths
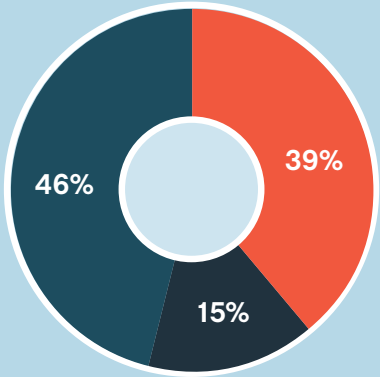
HAS THE AMOUNT OF LOW-QUALITY ADVERTISING THROUGH THE HEADER INCREASED OR DECREASED OVER THE LAST YEAR?

46%
39%
15%

- Increased 39%
- Decreased 15%
- Stayed the Same 46%

We're getting better at increasing bid density/participation rate, which reduces the access that low-quality inventory needs in order to win and render.

MANY WHO REPORTED AN INCREASE

in low-quality advertising blamed it on the Covid-based ad pause, with CPMs dropping and bad actors flooding the market. Several also noted that most of their exchange partners did not have the same creative blocking prowess as Google.

OB bids are partially obfuscated in the bid response back from GAM. It's hard to see if it's AdX or OB winning. We just set up some detection, but it's not clear if we're tracking OB correctly in order to win and render.

ARE YOU MORE LIKELY TO SEE AD QUALITY ISSUES WITHIN YOUR HEADER SETUP OR OB?

37%
50%
13%
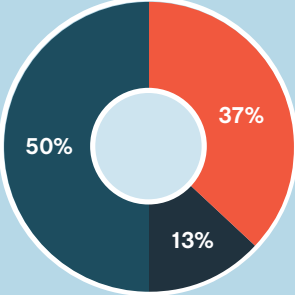
- Header 37%
- Open Bidding 13%
- It's the same 50%

WHAT TYPES OF LOW-QUALITY ADS AND MALVERTISING ARE MOST COMMON THROUGH THE HEADER?

16%
10%
23%
52%
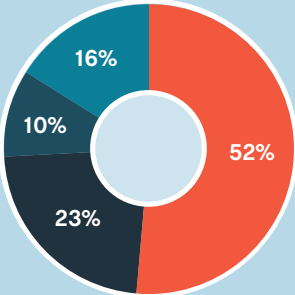
- Poor creative or creative not to spec 52%
- Auto-redirects 23%
- Inappropriate formats 10% (e.g., in-banner video)
- Other 16% (includes: inappropriate content and ads that slipped through category block lists.)

WHILE HEADER BIDDING ALLOWS

a publisher's preferred demand partners first crack at their inventory, the door is left wide open to malware, redirects, phishing scams, inappropriate creative, fraud, and beyond.

Last year GeoEdge's security team detected a unique widespread malvertising attack that was served largely through header bidding—in fact, 87% of the malvertising incidents came through the header. The attack took advantage of the open-source WebRTC protocol to deliver auto-redirects through Amazon AWS- Amazon's cloud service.

GeoEdge's security research revealed that ultimately publishers are 10x more likely to serve pop-ups through header bidding. In addition, publishers are less likely to serve redirects in their header, whereas they're 6x more likely to serve ads causing malicious file downloads.

ONLY 15% OF RESPONDENTS

had noted a change in header/OB demand since DSP The Trade Desk (TTD) made public in April 2020 its ask that exchange partners de-duplicate auctions. Some noted that it was hard to point out the effect of this move because of how much ad spending has transformed due to the pandemic.

There certainly has not been a uniform effect. A few publishers noted that TTD revenue was up, while others noted that their SSPs pushed all TTD demand through PreBid. Another commented that TTD demand dried up in their SSPs, and additional spend from Google's DV360 came in.

"SSP revenue isn't as balanced across the multiple integration types (OB / TAM / Prebid)," one publisher noted. "Once TTD forced our partners to choose a path, we noticed a clear winning integration emerge by partner."

6. WHAT'S NEXT?

HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR HEADER WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

Add demand partners
64%

Cut demand partner
67%

Switch to new wrapper
9%

Add additional wrapper(s)
6%

Integrate demand management tool into PreBid
12%

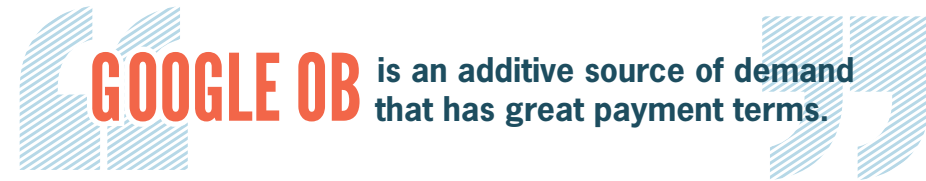Switch to managed header service
3%

Add footer bidding
**6%**

Other
15%

Other includes:
- Evaluate reseller Ads.txt entries
- Leverage a combination of PreBid.js and PreBid Server
- Test PreBid Floor Module
- Optimize supply paths toward PreBid
- Add identity partners for ID syncing

GOOGLE OB is an additive source of demand that has great payment terms.

NO PUBLISHER SAID they were planning to discontinue header use in the next six months, but there were rumblings in the comments about the future of client-side header bidding. Some don't see the technology surviving all that much longer.

"I'm ready for client side header bidding to be sunset," one respondent wrote. "It is a hack that will not withstand future technology/platform evolutions. Post cookiepocalypse it is completely unnecessary."
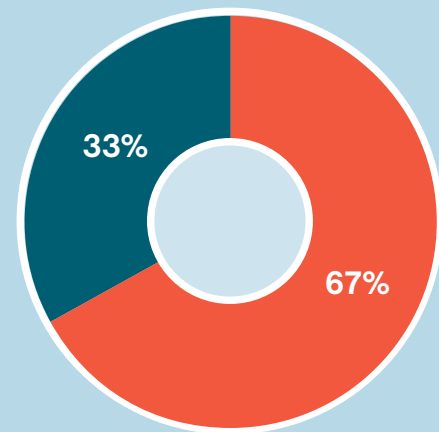
IF APPLICABLE, HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR OB SETUP WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?

33%
67%

- Increase demand partners 67%
- Decrease demand partners 33%

QUOTES FROM PUBLISHERS

- **We're looking to speed up** our header by cutting partners and reducing timeouts—however, we would like to find some additional options for server side integrations to help speed things along.

- **It's important** to make as much high-quality, incremental demand eligible for as many ad requests as possible.

- **We are almost 100% programmatic** and header bidding allows us to maximize the number of demand partners with a minimal amount of upkeep.

- **I wish there was a better way** to decrease unfilled impressions!

- **I love** that it is the most transparent marketplace so far. All bid activity is exposed and can be collected in real time on the client. This affords us, as the publisher, the most flexibility in how we collect our data and use it for auction optimizations

- **In-app header like tech is coming** fast and we're optimistic about the future.

- **Still going strong,** I don't see it going anywhere anytime soon.

7. QUALITY QUOTIENT

Publishers must strategize when it comes to earning strong header revenue while maintaining long-term, trust-based relationships with their audiences. A focus on quality assurance allows publishers to reap the benefits header bidding derives—without the risks to user experience and engagement.

What to look for when choosing an ad quality partner:

- **Pinpoint detection.** A trusted security partner needs the capability to constantly monitor the ad ecosystem, detect known threats to security, hone in on emerging threats and block them with precision, well before they reach the publisher's page.

- **Ad content quality management.** By evaluating ad content and landing page content, a trusted ad quality partner will offer flexible customization options to ensure your ad content is aligned with your page content. Protecting your brand with ads that are customized for your audience is key.

- **Lightweight integration.** When you know you need best-in-class security solutions, you have no time to waste. A trusted security partner needs to offer easy, fast integration that starts working for you immediately and doesn't take your teams away from their important work.

- **Insights across multiple publisher sites and platforms.** Security threats are best understood in the context of the digital ecosystem at large. In order to understand known threats and detect emerging threats, a security solution needs to trace hackers back to their source—detecting hackers no matter what path they choose.

8. SUMMARY

The header might be more popular than ever—however big changes do seem in store. Below are several takeaways combined with predictions for the near future.

- **The flexibility of PreBid** and its publisher-centric engineering will continue to make it the number one header option for publishers. Indeed, a few respondents said they were closing down their custom headers in favor of jumping on PreBid. Demand managers within PreBid are solid solutions for publishers lacking dev or analytical resources. All is not sunshine and rainbows, however—while new versions are welcome, some publishers complained of serious challenges with updates.

- **Although a majority of publishers are leveraging Open Bidding,** its large revenue cut and lack of transparency (particularly in comparison to PreBid) will stymie further adoption. Further auction de-depulication and increased traffic shaping will likely drive more demand through header integrations. However, Open Bidding does offer unique demand many publishers do not want to miss out on; at this point, most publishers are still adding partners within OB. It's still hard to see the channel's share of publisher programmatic revenue increasing much more.

- **The effects of TTD's auction de-duplication order** have yet to be fully accounted for, but demand will be less even across the same partners in multiple integrations (e.g., PreBid, TAN, Open Bidding). Most likely preferred supply paths will form within certain integrations. This is a fortuitous development as many publishers seem adamant about cleaning up supply paths and dropping resellers wherever possible.

- **In fighting off low-quality advertising and malvertising,** publishers badly need more support from their exchanges; it seems they could all learn a thing of two from Google.

- **Look for more adoption of PreBid Server** as publishers prepare for the sunset of the third-party cookie and realize hosting an auction client-side makes less and less sense.

admonsters

The global leader in strategic insight on the future of digital media and advertising technology. Through our conferences, website, and original research, we offer unparalleled in-person experiences and unique, high-quality content focused on media operations, monetization, technology, strategy, platforms and trends. We provide a forum to share best practices, explore new technology platforms and build relationships.

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.

For more info: Media contact:
See admonsters.com   marketing@admonsters.com
Follow us on Twitter: @AdMonsters   Sponsorship contact:
Facebook: facebook.com/admonsters   sales@admonsters.com

geo edge
Add Integrity

GedEdge's mission is to protect the integrity of the digital advertising ecosystem and to preserve a quality experience for users. GeoEdge's advanced security solutions ensure high ad quality and verify that sites/apps offer a clean, safe and engaging user experience, so publishers and app developers can focus on their business success.

App Developers and publishers around the world rely on GeoEdge to stop malicious and low-quality ads from reaching their audience. GeoEdge allows publishers to maximize their ad revenue without quality concerns, protect their brand reputation and increase their user loyalty. GeoEdge guards digital businesses against unwanted, malicious, offensive and inappropriate ads—without sacrificing revenue.

To learn more, visit: www.geoedge.com