

Don't Wait for Google

Many in the ad industry sighed in relief when they heard Google will delay phasing out third party cookies. While the news may be an anti-anxiety pill it sure shouldn't be a sleeping pill.

Publishers, Act Now

As the news broke a couple of well-known arguments were repeated. The first was that a delay was welcome because both marketers and publishers need more time to think of new options on how to support targeted advertising, among other so that publishers still have an effective way of monetizing their inventory. This argument makes all the sense in the world to buyers, who have been able to recognize users across domains, collect massive amounts of data and to effectively monetize it. The death of third party cookies is damaging to them because it puts an end to a practice that gave buyers great control, and little reliance on a single seller.

However, it seems that whoever thinks that the death of third party cookies is bad for publishers is thinking short term. Publisher revenue may very well take a hit short term as buyers lose the ability to recognize users, but we should remember that third party cookies never did publishers much good. As third party cookies made publisher data widely available across the internet, publishers haven't been able to monetize their data as third party cookies have commoditized publisher data. On the other hand, since third party cookies have been discontinued publishers have been given a golden opportunity to put a price tag on their data again, which is also a reason why to be careful about first party cookie initiatives, as they are essentially a workaround to maintain the status quo.

Publishers should be well underway with collecting and activating publisher first party data, and those who are not must start now. Because regardless of what Google eventually decides to do, publishers are in a great position to collect privacy-safe data based on direct consumer relationships, and at a detail level that is unlikely to be matched by anyone else. Moreover, by working with publishers, buyers can activate their data and effectively utilize publisher data, all without using dubious methods of identifying consumers across domains. The future brings a direct relationship between publishers and advertisers, and publishers should start setting the table.

Don't Cry for Consumers

The second argument why Google's delay was a good thing had to do with consumers, and how the industry could think up new ways to keep offering relevant advertising to consumers who reportedly seem to value it. This seems like wishful thinking:

- *"Seven in ten people (73%) want governments to do more to regulate Big Tech, with a clear majority (71%) worried about how tech companies collect and use their personal data" - [Amnesty, December 2019](#)*
- *"Some 63 percent said they would like to see "less targeted advertising" in the future, while 9 percent said they wanted more. When asked to compare them with traditional forms of advertising, 41 percent said targeted ads are "worse" while 21 percent said they are "better."" - [Reuters, March 2018](#)*
- *"A poll was conducted by YouGov, related to the targeted ads revealed that only 27% of those who surveyed believe that targeted advertisements are a convenient way for them to see products they are interested in, while a majority 51% of the Americans do not agree to the concept of targeted ads, as according to them personal data can be used inappropriately in the process. " - [Digital Information World, May 2019](#)*

While the numbers seem to vary, they all tell the same story: most people value privacy over targeting. And protecting user privacy isn't something that will blow over; it will gain momentum.

It seems clear that if tears are to be shed, they should be shed over buyers no longer being able to monetize user data using a system that was never good for privacy to begin with. But let's not pretend that phasing out third party cookies is bad for publishers nor consumers.

One Solution to Multiple Problems

Now Google has given themselves another two years to come up with something new, and there are many reasons for both buyers and sellers not to wait and see what it will be.

One of the more important reasons is that direct relationships between buyers and sellers seems to be the natural solution to the many problems surrounding programmatic advertising; the fact that half or more of ad budgets goes to other things than media spending, 15% disappear without a trace, 80% of user matching is based on the disappearing third party cookie, and that it is inherently incompatible with privacy safe advertising; all these are reasons why there may be time to look for a better alternative. And that will not likely come from Google.