

CVS goes self-service with ads, joining other retail media networks

Article



CVS Media Exchange (CMX) announced yesterday the beta launch of a new [self-service](#) offering in collaboration with The Trade Desk. The offering includes enhanced audience [targeting](#), transparent ad pricing, the ability to activate media through its data service provider, and improved performance insights.

For CMX, the move to self-service is about “unleashing autonomy and efficiency” for brands, said Parbinder Dhariwal, vice president and general manager at CMX.

“Our partnership with CVS Media Exchange will make it easy for brands and agencies to access the deterministic signals they need to reach verified buyers throughout their customer journey, as well as see the sales impact from their media investment,” said Ben Sylvan, vice president of data partnerships at The Trade Desk.

Self-service ads, which let brands control their own ad buys through budget optimization, customizable audience groups, or reporting and [analytics](#) tools, are an increasing trend in [retail media](#), one [we predicted earlier this year](#). Self-service ads function in contrast with managed ads, where a third party buys digital advertising on behalf of a brand.

- [Instacart](#) has offered self-service advertising for years.
- [Kroger Precision Marketing moved its self-service retail media ad platform](#) in-house last year.
- [Walmart Connect announced self-service inventory for its TV](#) wall and for smaller advertisers in April.

Lack of self-serve [programmatic](#) tools is US advertisers’ No. 3 challenge involved in using [retail media networks](#) (RMNs), according to a May 2023 study from The Trade Desk. Some 69% of [retail](#) and brand professionals worldwide want to buy self-service ads with a specific RMN, according to Q1 2023 data from Epsilon and CitrusAd.

Top 5 Challenges Involved in Using Retail Media Networks According to US Advertisers, May 2023

% of respondents



Source: The Trade Desk, “2023 Retail Report” with Material+, June 28, 2023

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There are a few possible reasons so many RMNs—and other ad networks like Spotify, LinkedIn, and Uber—are offering self-service.

- **Concerns about ad placements:** As retail media moves off-site, advertisers are worried about programmatic ads going to [made-for-advertising \(MFA\) websites](#) that lack customer engagement. Though these sites represent “a small chunk of a small chunk of most brands’ media spending,” per our analyst Max Willens, advertisers still seek control and transparency over where ads end up.
- **Constrained budgets:** Over half (58%) of US [marketing](#) decision-makers expect their retail media budgets to remain the same this year, according to January 2024 data from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) and Advertising Perceptions. Without more money going to advertising, these brands need to be efficient with their spending. Eliminating the middleman of managed advertising can help maximize ad dollars.
- **AI’s unlock:** AI can optimize programmatic ad placements and help ad buyers analyze information faster and more comprehensively than ever before, eliminating some need for managed advertising.
- **Opportunities for smaller brands:** Smaller brands are recognizing the importance of retail media, but without massive budgets, they can’t launch major ad campaigns the same way a major consumer packaged goods company might. Self-serve ads allow for these brands to make small, targeted ad buys.

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