

Do People Actually Want Personalized Ads?

Article

The belief that consumers crave more targeted, personalized ads has become a digital advertising mantra. But it's not entirely true.

Sure, there are a slew of studies by trade groups and retail and marketing vendors showing that "relevant" ads increase engagement and purchasing.

Adlucent found that seven in 10 consumers **yearn for personalized ads**. IAB presentations state that consumers want fewer, **but more personalized ads**. Epsilon found that four-fifths of consumers are **more likely to make purchases** when a brand gives them a personalized

experience. In a Segment survey, 71% of consumers were **frustrated that their shopping experiences were too impersonal**. The consumer demand for personalized content is **at an all-time high**, according to Adobe.

But when consumers are asked about the data collection practices that empower personalized ads, they tell a different story.

Network security firm **RSA found** that just 17% of internet users surveyed in the US and Europe said it was ethical to track their online activity for the purpose of personalizing ads. Only 25% thought it was ethical either to tailor news feeds or make purchase recommendations based on browsing history.



Privacy and security concerns are likely a major reason, but respondents also indicated that tracking and targeting weren't giving them a relevant experience: Just 29% of RSA's respondents agreed that handing over their data resulted in better products or services, down from 31% the previous year. These findings are similar to those in a recent **report from Pew Research Center**. More than half of the US Facebook users surveyed by Pew said they were "not very" or "not at all comfortable" with the social giant tracking their activity to compile their "ad preferences," and most other respondents were ambivalent.

The Pew and RSA surveys align with years of research in which consumers have consistently stated that they don't want to trade their personal data for more relevant ads.

A 2017 Mumsnet poll of its UK readers showed that two-thirds of respondents were **unhappy to see targeted advertising** based on either their online behavior or on data they had given an advertiser. Pew Research Center found in 2016 that most people **didn't want to trade data privacy** for more targeted ads. In a 2012 poll of US adults by the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, 61% **didn't want to be shown ads tailored** to their interests. That followed a 2009 version of the poll where **two-thirds had said the same**.



Even if advertisers remain convinced relevance is the answer, September 2018 polling from **Salesforce** found that more than half of marketers worldwide claimed they were being “more mindful” of the balance between personalization and privacy than they had been two years earlier.