

Do People Actually Want Personalized Ads?

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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.

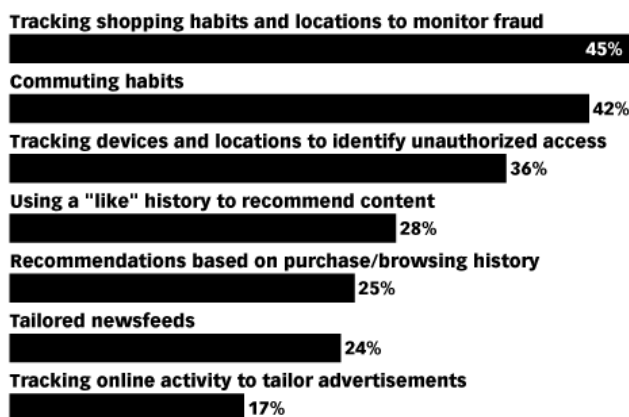
Adlucent found that seven in 10 consumers **yearn for personalized ads**. IAB presentations state that consumers want fewer, **but more personalized ads**. Epsilon found that four-fifths of consumers are **more likely to make purchases** when a brand gives them a personalized experience. In a Segment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

Internet Users in the US and Europe* Who Believe that Select Personalization Methods Are Ethical, Dec 2018

% of respondents



*Note: ages 18+; 48% of respondents believe that there are ethical ways in which a company can use their personal information/data; *France, Germany and UK*

Source: RSA Security, "RSA Data Privacy & Security Survey 2019: The Growing Disconnect Between Consumers and Businesses," Feb 6, 2019

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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.

How Do Marketers Worldwide Feel About Their Organization's Approach to Personalization and Privacy?

% of respondents, Sep 2018

More mindful about balancing personalization and privacy than two years ago

51%

Our brand goes beyond regulations and/or industry standards to protect and respect customer privacy

44%

Balancing personalization and privacy is a challenge

35%

Complying with regional and/or local privacy regulations is a challenge

33%

Completely satisfied with our ability to balance personalization with privacy

30%

Source: Salesforce, "State of Marketing: Fifth Edition," Dec 13, 2018

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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.