

Who's Responsible for Brand Safety?

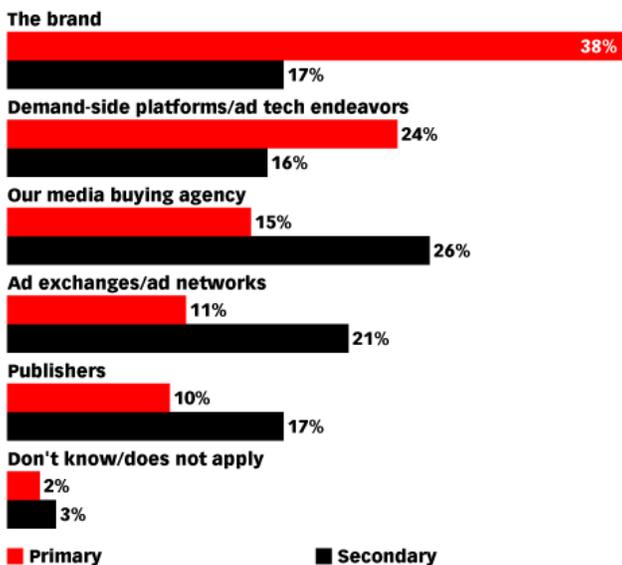
Article

Advertisers agree that ensuring brand safety is a perennial problem. But there isn't a consensus on who is most responsible for it.

In a March 2018 survey of 522 advertising decision makers in the US and Europe conducted by **Sizmek**, 38% of the respondents surveyed said that brands are primarily responsible for ensuring brand safety. At least 10% of respondents felt that ad agencies, publishers, ad buying platforms or ad networks were the most responsible parties for brand safety.

Who Do Brand Marketers in Europe* and the US Think Is Responsible for Brand Safety? March 2018

% of respondents



Note: *France, Germany and the UK

Source: Sizmek, "Marketers Survey Results 2018: An Insider's Look at Media, Brand Safety, and Partnerships," Aug 22, 2018

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Previous research on this topic placed the brand safety onus on media buying firms and ad agencies. In a September 2017 poll of 300 worldwide senior marketers conducted by CMO Council, two-thirds of respondents said that **media buying firms are responsible** for proper ad placement.

However, the results in Sizmek's study indicate that marketers themselves believe that the brands themselves are more responsible for brand safety than their agency representatives. Sizmek's study also calls more attention to ad tech's role in placing ads where brands don't want them.

When activists began calling out advertisers for placing their ads next to controversial content, advertisers blamed the complicated nature of programmatic ad buying for placing ads in places where they didn't want them. If the sell-side and buy-side ad tech vendor categories in Sizmek's survey are combined, then about one-third of the worldwide senior marketers polled say that ad tech is both primarily and secondarily responsible for brand safety. The two most common brand safety tactics are blocking controversial webpages and managing blacklists, which about half of the polled advertisers said they do.

Brand safety has been a topic of much consternation in the ad industry. About a year ago, several brands took their ads off YouTube in response to a report that The Times of London

published about brand ads appearing in YouTube videos that promoted terrorism.

Many of these advertisers came back to YouTube, but this controversy continues to make the rounds at ad industry events. Since the ad pullouts on YouTube became news, ad tech firms used the scandal to **hawk their own products**, advertisers **developed new roles** for people to specialize in brand safety, some brands **reduced the number of sites** they place ads on and a **new trade group** for brand safety launched.

While Sizmek's survey shows that advertisers have mixed feelings about who is responsible for brand safety, its results allude that brands should be held most responsible for taking control of where their ads run. If brands don't demand more control and clarity in digital ad buying, it's not very likely that anyone else will.