

How Ad Tech Companies Are Becoming Publishers

Overlap is growing in the ad supply chain

INTERVIEW | **MAY 2018**

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An interview with:
Todd Garland

CEO
BuySellAds

Digital media is becoming more convoluted, as some **advertisers act like publishers** and some **publishers act like ad tech companies**. And now some ad tech companies are acting like publishers, which became more evident with the **recent purchase of news aggregator Digg** by the ad network **BuySellAds**. eMarketer's Ross Benes spoke with Todd Garland, CEO of BuySellAds, about why some vendors venture into the digital publishing space.

eMarketer:

Why did you want to buy a digital publisher like Digg?

Todd Garland:

We were trying to secure a sales exclusivity deal for a big property. Then we just got to talking with the folks over there and it made more sense for us to buy a majority stake in Digg. We were starting to see a lot of overlap with our advertisers spending money on Digg, and we have been wanting to move further into more consumer-y tech-type inventory.

eMarketer:

Were you interested in purchasing them so that you could harvest their user data?

Todd Garland:

A lot of people thought that this was similar to Viant buying Myspace. That deal, as I understood it, was **largely around the user data**. This is the complete opposite of that. Like, we really don't care about user data. We never have since the beginning of BuySellAds.

eMarketer:

A lot of ad tech execs would disagree with you and say there's lots of value to be had from selling people's data.

Todd Garland:

I can't tell you how many times we've been approached by data brokers looking to buy our data, and it's just such an easy "no" for us. Sure, we could probably make a few extra hundred thousand dollars a month. But the steam train that is the General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] is coming down the track right now.

eMarketer:

What you think of the GDPR?

Todd Garland:

It is kind of like when browsers no longer allowed pop-up windows. It took a browser to get everybody else to clean up their act.

And so, it's unfortunate that it's the government that's forcing us all to clean up our act. But it's like, you know what? How many trade groups have been created in ad tech over the past few years? And yes, they're making progress, and they have good people and they're trying to do things better. But it took the government to do something about it before ad tech could do it, which is shameful in my mind.

eMarketer:

You sound pretty fed up with the industry you chose.

Todd Garland:

I actually love ad tech. I just wish that the past 10 years had more altruistic endeavors, that's all.

eMarketer:

Are you looking to buy more media properties?

Todd Garland:

We're looking for other properties similar to Digg, and certainly the audience. Without a doubt.

eMarketer:

Do you think it will become common for ad tech companies to purchase publishers?

Todd Garland:

I don't mean to sound hopeless for new media companies, but who wants to buy these things that need a lot of work to become profitable? We're lucky that Digg was not one of those companies. Sure, we're doing some work in there to clean things up. But I think there's a lot of other publishers that on the outside look amazing, but once you get down to them financially, they're probably a huge mess.

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