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Meredith Corp's Alysia Borsa on Effects of GDPR and CCPA on Publishing

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In recent years, the digital advertising and media industries have had to reckon with changes to how they can use customer data. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) set standards for how companies can use personal data, and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) will follow suit starting in 2020. Industry-led changes like Safari's Intelligent Tracking Prevention (ITP) and similar browser updates have also restricted what marketers and media companies can do.

As part of our recent report, "Consumer Attitudes on Marketing 2019: Privacy Concerns Mount, and Ad Blocking Isn't Going Away," we talked to Alysia Borsa, chief marketing and data officer at media conglomerate Meredith, about these privacy changes and how they're affecting publishers' businesses.

How has consumer privacy-oriented legislation like GDPR and CCPA or industry changes like intelligent tracking prevention affected your advertising business?

For us, the browser changes have probably had the most impact. We've seen a direct impact on open-market programmatic pricing as a result of these changes. GDPR has impacted us, but not significantly because

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we're predominantly US-focused. We were proactive about GDPR and able to get the majority of users to opt in. We definitely expect an impact from CCPA and any upcoming or anticipated privacy regulation changes.

Overall, we have trusted brands. We have direct relationships with our consumers. We want to be, and have historically been, pretty conservative in making sure that we not only follow regulations, but that we are also as transparent as possible with our consumers. We believe the industry needs to be more transparent and provide consumers with more choice.

Let's talk a bit about context. What do you offer, as far as contextual targeting?

We group our sites based on category, so if you want to target food, there are multiple different sites. We also offer contextual targeting based on specific site, channel, page type and now rolling out targeting against our proprietary taxonomy.

It's interesting because there's definitely been an uptick in the demand to target contextually with the coming of CCPA and GDPR, but there's still significant demand from advertising partners for audience targeting. Just as email's back again, contextual targeting is back again. The benefit for us is we're working to make sure that it's not just contextual targeting based on the URL and the site structure, but also taking advantage of being able to target against our deep taxonomy.

When we categorize content and experiences, we go really deep. The primary purpose of that is to understand our consumers and drive product content and, ultimately, better audience targeting. Our deep taxonomy also enables really rich contextual targeting. The counter to that is you still need scale. ... You want to be targeted, whether it's by audience or contextually, but you still need to make sure you have the scale.

How do you use data to improve the user experience?

We use data and extensive testing to improve the user experience. We have redesigned our entire front-end template to optimize the user

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experience. As part of Meredith's acquisition of Time Inc., we are also bringing our back ends, systems and tools together.

This work is all in service of driving superior user engagement: How do we increase page views, lower bounce rates and increase engagement? Part of answering those questions is addressing how we optimize for SEO, viewability, ad load and delaying ad load ads that are not in view right away. We have to be really smart about serving up the right experience to our users and the right design across multiple factors.

We also run all of our partners' creative and tags through a validation tool so that if they don't fit the specifications that we have identified, they'll kick them back and request revisions to ensure a good user experience. For programmatic campaigns, we have a passive monitoring tool. That's checking for fraud and malware, but it's also looking for creatives that are out of spec or tags that drag down the page. We also have proactive tools in place, as well as strict frequency capping. In general, we're pushing our advertising partners toward ads types that don't interrupt the experience and are more native and integrated with our content.

For more insights on consumer attitudes towards ads, eMarketer PRO subscribers can read our recent report:

Report by Nicole Perrin Aug 29, 2019

Consumer Attitudes on Marketing 2019

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