

# Here's How Facebook Has Restricted Ad Targeting

The social giant keeps changing its ad policies

**ARTICLE** | **MARCH 25, 2019**

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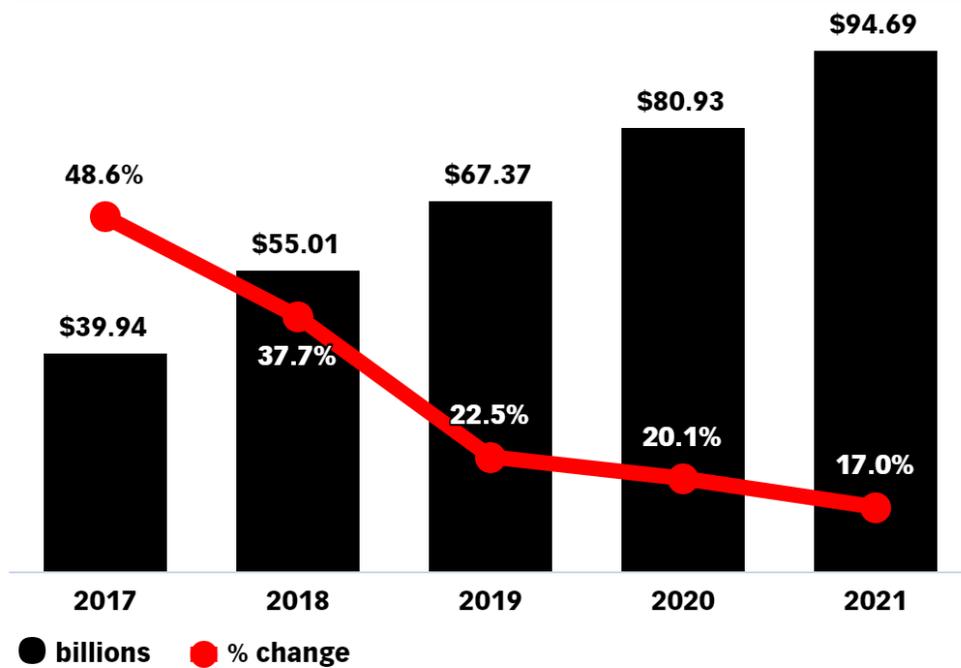
*Last updated on August 21, 2019*

Data-sharing scandals and public outcry keep driving Facebook to change its ad targeting features. But Facebook's updated ad policies weren't enough for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, which **charged Facebook** with housing discrimination for violating the Fair Housing Act with its ads.

We forecast that Facebook's worldwide ad revenues will grow 22.5% to \$67.37 billion this year. However, continual targeting restrictions could make Facebook less appealing to advertisers and alter their spend on the platform.

## Facebook Ad Revenues

Worldwide, 2017-2021



Source: eMarketer, February 2019

www.eMarketer.com

Facebook's ad targeting capabilities have been scrutinized since it became embroiled in a scandal for improperly sharing data with Cambridge Analytica. Subsequent reports showed that Facebook shared personal data with other apps in a way that wasn't transparent to most users. After the scandals piled up, regulators and federal prosecutors reportedly began investigating the social giant's data deals. And public trust declined, too.

Facebook responded to these issues by eliminating some ad targeting options, a strategy it uses whenever reporters reveal Facebook advertisers used unscrupulous targeting criteria. Here is a list of times Facebook changed targeting features since the Cambridge Analytica scandal caught fire in March 2018. This list will be updated as Facebook updates its ad policies.

### Eliminating Rarely Used Ad Targeting Options

Date: July 2019

**What Happened:** Facebook got rid of thousands of targeting options that are rarely used by advertisers. The targeting options include older song titles and specific location-based targets such as targeting ads based on a person's interest in a specific neighborhood. Facebook said it made these changes as part of a periodic housecleaning aimed at decluttering its system.

### **Rolling Out "Clear History" Feature**

**Date:** May 2019

**What happened:** Facebook alerted advertisers that it will give people the ability to delete data that Facebook gathers on them outside of the social network. Advertisers have relied on this data for their ad targeting. By the time the feature debuted, **it was modified** so that it would "disconnect" users from the targeting data instead of "clearing" the data.

### **Demographic and Location Data Restrictions for Employment and Credit Ads**

**Date:** March 2019

**What happened:** In a legal settlement with advocacy groups such as the National Fair Housing Alliance and the Communications Workers of America, Facebook agreed to redact age, gender and ZIP code information from being targetable for housing, employment and credit ads. Facebook also updated its Lookalike Audience product so that it would no longer including age, zip codes, Group membership and religious views as targeting options for those three ad categories.

### **Banning Anti-Vax Ads**

**Date:** March 2019

**What happened:** Following **reports on the prevalence of anti-vaccine ads** on Facebook, the company decided to ban ads that promote misinformation about vaccines. The company also said that anti-vax content will appear less frequently in people's News Feeds.

### **Removing Nazi Terms**

**Date:** February 2019

**What happened:** The Los Angeles Times reported that Nazi-related topics, such as Joseph Goebbels and the neo-Nazi band Skrewdriver, could be used to target Facebook ads. In response, Facebook said it removed these targeting options.

### **Giving Users More Information About Advertisers**

**Date:** February 2019

**What happened:** Facebook began showing users which companies used their information to target ads at them using Facebook's Custom Audiences product.

### **Removing 5,000 Targeting Options**

**Date:** August 2018

**What happened:** After HUD [said that Facebook violated the Fair Housing Act](#) by allowing ads on its platform that discriminate against ethnic and religious groups, Facebook removed 5,000 targeting options. Facebook [prevented advertisers from intentionally hiding their ads from people who used identifying terms](#) such as "Native American culture" and "Buddhism."

### **Custom Audiences Update**

**Date:** April 2018

**What happened:** New terms for Facebook's Custom Audiences took effect in anticipation of GDPR. Now, advertisers must warrant that they have obtained the necessary rights and permissions to use the data they upload to Facebook to create Custom Audiences for ad targeting. Users who have opted out must be removed from Custom Audiences.

### **Political Ad Disclosures**

**Date:** April 2018

**What happened:** Facebook required that advertisers verify their identity and location before they are able to place political ads and "issue ads" on Facebook.

## Eliminating Third-Party Data Products

**Date:** March 2018

**What happened:** Facebook announced that it was shutting down its Partner Categories product, which enabled third-party data providers to offer their targeting services and data directly on the platform.