

Why Publishers Are Eliminating Programmatic Silos

These transactions are merging with direct sales

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Ross Benes



An interview with:

Sara Badler

Head of Programmatic Revenue and Strategy
Dotdash

The continuous **growth of programmatic advertising** is forcing some of its biggest holdouts to embrace these types of transactions, and publishers are **folding them into their overall sales structure**. Sara Badler, head of programmatic revenue and strategy at online publisher Dotdash, spoke with eMarketer's Ross Benes about programmatic sales strategies and how ad tech integrations might look in the future.

eMarketer:

Some publishers worry that programmatic cannibalizes their direct sales efforts. How does Dotdash structure its programmatic sales?

Sara Badler:

We have a sales team who is the market for both programmatic and direct sales.

eMarketer:

Selling direct and programmatic require different skill sets. Is it tough to marry those together in each sales rep?

Sara Badler:

Everyone is kind of interested in both [programmatic and direct sales] and has this stake in the game and can speak to both programmatic and direct deals. We're ramping up [programmatic] training, and everyone is super cool with trying to be educated on it.

eMarketer:

Publishers have often used programmatic to sell standard banner ads and remnant inventory. But publishers like Vox Media and The New York Times have started selling custom ad units programmatically. Do you restrict certain ad units from being sold programmatically?

“I guess there are a lot of marketers that are starting to do more programmatic things in-house, so the DSP might become something that isn’t always necessary. But I think that’s still being figured out.”

Sara Badler:

We sell all of our units programmatically. Homepage, high-impact, native, all that stuff is sold programmatically.

eMarketer:

A lot of the supply-side platforms [SSPs] are **now running first-price auctions**. Does that impact Dotdash?

Sara Badler:

It really hasn’t affected us as much as I think it affects buyers. For us, we’re seeing more advertisers. There’s a wider variety of advertisers scaling on our site across the different verticals just because we’re seeing advertisers that might not have won [programmatic auctions] in the past being able to win now.

eMarketer:

Have you made any interesting updates to your ad tech stack recently?

Sara Badler:

We’ve integrated private marketplace [PMP] deals with Amazon’s Transparent Ad Marketplace.

eMarketer:

PMPs have become such a crucial part of programmatic, I figured all the sell-side vendors have offered that capability for a while now.

Sara Badler:

I think all of them are either thinking about doing it or are in the stages of talking about doing it. But not everyone does it today.

eMarketer:

Some ad buyers are **pushing to cut down the tech middlemen** that sit between advertisers and publishers. When you sell inventory programmatically, are you still having to sell through an SSP that connects to the ad buyer's demand-side platform [DSP]?

Sara Badler:

I think everyone's setup is different, but you still need an SSP and a DSP. I guess there are a lot of marketers that are starting to do more **programmatic things in-house**, so the DSP might become something that isn't always necessary. But I think that's still being figured out. It's part of the whole evolution.

eMarketer:

The General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] **has created anxiety** within the ad tech industry. If this actually leads marketers to whittle down the number of tech vendors they use, is it possible marketers will request that publishers connect straight to their DSPs and get rid of their SSPs?

Sara Badler:

It's too early to tell. I agree those discussions are happening now and that people are starting to figure out what vendors they need. And data is playing more and more into every single conversation that we have. There are a lot of conversations that are happening about it, but [ad industry insiders] are just trying to figure out what would make sense.

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