

What Marketers Need to Know about Programmatic in a COVID World

When the world shut down, online media consumption went way, way up. Streaming services and online gaming companies saw engagement go through the roof. (Do you know anyone who didn't binge-watch "The Queen's Gambit" or "Mandalorian?") And with everyone staying at home, it's no surprise that [digital advertising has outpaced](#) other media, especially radio and OOH. This means marketers have an unprecedented opportunity to reach consumers across screens as consumers spend more time online than ever before.

While we all want the pandemic to end as soon as possible, the fact is many of us could be home for a long while. Even as kids go back to school and some of us go back to work, there will be fewer nights out as most of our favorite outings and pastimes remain off-limits. From that, we can assume that digital media consumption will likely remain high for the foreseeable future. That means if you aren't investing in [programmatic](#) yet, now's the time! And if you are, here are some ideas to consider for the months ahead.

Be prepared for the brave, new, cookie-free world

Along with the challenges we've all personally faced over the last year, our industry has had a hurdle of its own: the digital advertising space, as the result of changes to privacy regulations, has had to abandon our favorite digital identifier, the cookie. Without cookies, advertisers have to look to other means - like context and other cues - to keep ads relevant and personal. For the most part, this means that ads will be less individualized, so the pressure will be on creatives to ensure that messages resonate with a larger cohort of consumers.

It also means that marketers are going to have to take a different approach to targeting. If you're working with an agency that's private-labeling a [DSP](#) or partnered with one, you'll need to find out how they're handling this massive sea-change in the industry, because there's no single road that everyone is taking. Some are looking at mobile IDs as a silver bullet, but truthfully, nobody knows. If your agency or DSP seems really confident in their solution, ask a lot of questions and demand well-documented responses.

The bottom line is that moving forward, you're going to have to experiment with different types of targeting to see what works best. At Beeswax, we know we don't have all the answers, but we're doing our best to keep marketers informed so you can make better decisions. ([Download our white paper on digital identity to learn more.](#))

Think beyond the digital page

While you're thinking about how to target, also think about where you can reach your audiences. Sometimes it's easy to forget that digital advertising goes beyond text and images - even when we know how much streaming media we watch and listen to ourselves. According to eMarketer, [programmatic display spending grew over 10 percent in 2020](#) and will grow 24.1 percent this year - with most of that growth in connected TV. Digital audio also saw tremendous growth.

So, be sure to look beyond traditional desktop and mobile display formats. Expand into audio and video, especially while the work-from-home trend continues. Programmatic allows marketers to reach and engage audiences far beyond "the banner," so consider broadening your asset library to include these other formats.

Reconsider customer behavior

If you're relying on customer personae to guide your marketing strategy, make sure you're considering how your customer behavior has changed during the pandemic. Some of the changes you may think are obvious probably aren't as clear as you think. For example, it seems logical that as more people stay home, screen time on mobile devices would drop, but in fact, [it skyrocketed](#). More people spent time on social networks and streaming shows and music than when life was "normal" - even with a sharp drop in commuting and more time at home. So do your homework.

Also consider that there are new audiences to be gained through these channels. Are your parents suddenly spending time on Hulu and Crave? They're probably not the only older Americans who are now engaging with digital media in new ways. A recent study showed [41 percent of seniors have streamed TV shows](#) during the pandemic, and 29 percent have streamed audio. If you're targeting Boomers and the Greatest Gen, that's something to think about.

If you're a B2B marketer, you'll also need to rethink your targeting. Apart from the spending freezes and layoffs that many companies may have seen last year, don't forget that many employees are working from home, and their on-screen habits have probably changed. For example, if they're not commuting in the morning, how are they spending that "found" time, and is it an opportunity to engage them? What kind of messages, which channels and which devices will work best in their circumstances, and how might their buying cycle have changed?

Put the customer first, always

The coronavirus pandemic has definitely changed the way we live and work, and along with other factors, it will impact our marketing, too. As you reimagine your programmatic advertising strategy, remember to put the customer first and consider not only how and where to target them, but how their needs have changed as well.

As a parting thought, just remember that things are tough for a lot of Americans right now, so think carefully about your messaging and creative. Authenticity is always important, and so is sensitivity. Programmatic is a powerful way to reach and engage consumers: use your power wisely. When you put the customer first and are sensitive to their needs and concerns, everybody wins.