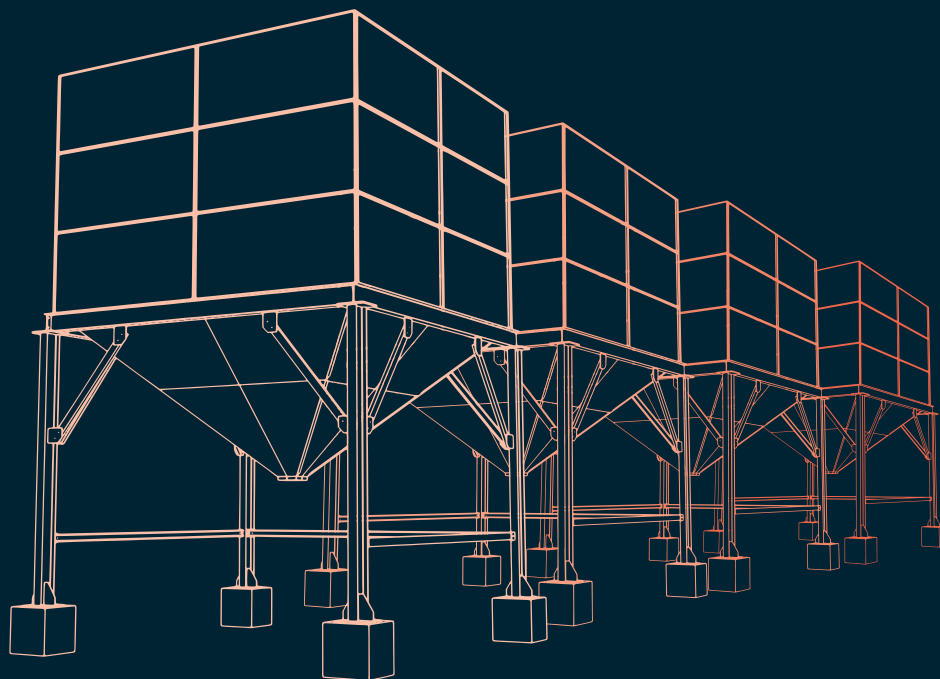




PLAYBOOK

Why Publishers Need to Break Down
Their First-Party Data Silos



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WHAT'S A PLAYBOOK?

A playbook is an extension of what the AdMonsters community has been doing at our conferences for 20 years. A playbook solidifies what has made our events “must attend” for many digital strategists. By bringing people together to share learnings and best practices in a focused way, people can create a plan and avoid hours—if not days—of doing research on their own.

The AdMonsters playbook concept takes existing AdMonsters content (from conferences and AdMonsters.com) and, with the help of the AdMonsters community, “crowd sources” a document that outlines best practices on a particular topic. Our belief is that this will allow for a free exchange of ideas with the benefit of curation for accuracy. This document does not get into specifics around individual solution providers intentionally.

Great effort has gone into writing the playbook in a fashion that applies to as many publishers as possible without becoming too general. In a technology-driven industry like digital advertising, information quickly becomes obsolete. The intention is that, based on the feedback of the AdMonsters community, the next playbook will start to take shape and, with additional contributors, grow in both depth and breadth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1** Introduction: Wait, Do Publishers Still Have Silos? | 4
- 2** Executive Summary: An Unrealized Opportunity for Engagement & Loyalty | 5
- 3** Key Findings | 6
- 4** Missed Opportunities | 7
- 5** How Publishers Collect First-Party Data | 10
- 6** State of Data Sharing within an Organization | 12
- 7** The Ideal State: Channel Harmonization | 14
- 8** The Playbook | 19
- 9** About This Study | 20

1. WAIT, WHY DO PUBLISHERS STILL HAVE DATA SILOS?

Publishers face steep competition for user's attention and an urgent need to build stronger relationships with their audiences. While crafting highly personalized and seamless experiences across all channels is table stakes, too many internal teams fail to share their data and unite on what the user experience should be.

Meanwhile, the deprecation of third-party cookies has marketers and their agencies looking for privacy-compliant tactics to reach and engage their audiences. First-party data is widely seen as an avenue for creating successful campaigns, and publishers are keen to develop their first-party offerings.

Many publishers potentially sit on a trove of valuable first-party data, as users are generally willing to sign-up for newsletters and opt-in to data usage, as long as they understand the value they'll receive in return.

The value exchange is best articulated if it is catered to the user's specific interests. Sharing data internally allows publishers to create and demonstrate highly personalized value exchanges across all channels.

Now more than ever, publishers need to fully harmonize their cross-channel experiences with personalized content for each user. This led us to ask:

- ***To what degree do publishers share data internally?***
- ***For what purposes is that data shared internally?***
- ***Are engagement touchpoints as fully harmonized and personalized to the user experience as they could be?***
- ***What role does first-party data play in the publisher's user acquisition, retention, reengagement and growth strategies?***

To find out, we surveyed ad operations, marketing and sales team members, chief revenue officers, data scientists and other personnel within leading digital publishing companies.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: AN UNREALIZED OPPORTUNITY FOR ENGAGEMENT AND LOYALTY

Publishers have rich and varied opportunities to collect unique first-party data about their users and how they engage with their sites. From information collected at registration or provided by end users who respond to surveys and quizzes, to contextual data gleaned as users click through their sites, consume content, watch videos and click on ads, publishers sit on a trove of data.

This data provides nuanced insights into users and their unique interests, and can be leveraged to individualize content, keep users engaged longer, and re-engage dormant ones. It can also be used to help advertisers target the right audiences for their ads, and in so doing, help publishers command premium CPMs for their engaged and valuable audiences.

These are just some of the ways publishers can put their first-party data to use in service of their users, advertisers and team members, but few publishers are taking advantage of the true potential of their data.

Intuitively we understand that customizing content to an individual user will promote loyalty and engagement, yet just 9% of survey respondents say their organizations use that data effectively to personalize content to individual readers.

Half of our survey respondents say their organizations are somewhat effective at using first-party data to re-engage users, an indication that the data to personalize experiences exists and is deployed by some teams within the organization, but isn't shared widely enough to allow publishers to reap its full benefits.

All of this adds up to missed opportunities for publishers to drive and optimize their revenue. In fact, 67% of respondents agreed that if they had access to the full range of first-party data their organizations collect, they could generate more revenue from the channels they manage.

Personalization is key: just 17% of respondents say offers from partners that are unrelated to a user's specific interests are valuable, and only 15% say that coordinating non-individualized content across channels is useful. In contrast, 70% of respondents say that content that's coordinated across all devices contributes to a harmonized cross-channel experience, but only if it caters to the user's interests.

3. KEY FINDINGS

- Only **10%** of publishers say they do a good job at using first-party data to individualize content—table stakes for keeping users engaged.
- **67%** of respondents said they could generate more revenue in their channels if they had access to all first-party data their companies collect.
- There is a difference between “cross-channel experiences” and “harmonized cross-channel experiences.” The latter requires that content across all touch points—website, mobile site, mobile app, email newsletter, push notifications, SMS newsletter—is individualized to each visitor using first-party data driven insights.
- Harmonization is the ideal, as **80%** of respondents said it will lead to users spending more time on their sites. More than half —**53%**—said it would lead to users recommending their publications to others.
- Just **5%** of respondents characterized their cross-channel experience as fully harmonized. This isn’t shocking considering **50%** of respondents say they rarely or never collaborate with other departments to create them.
- What’s getting in their way? The biggest impediment: **45%** say that every channel has its own KPIs and goals.
- Less than a quarter of respondents—**23%**—say their organizations use first-party data to effectively personalize ads to their users, even though digital advertising is a critical component to the overall user experience.
- But there’s hope on the horizon: **67%** of respondents say their companies have plans to engage new partners and acquire new tools so that they can better deploy their first-party data.

10%

agree their organizations effectively leverage first-party data to personalize content

67%

believe they could generate more revenue if they had more access to first-party data

53%

state that fully harmonized cross-channels will lead to more engagement and referrals

5%

rate their cross-channel user experiences as “well harmonized”

4. MISSED OPPORTUNITIES TO DRIVE REVENUE

Engagement = revenue. The more pages a user sees, the more opportunities publishers have to show ads and earn revenue. Conversely, the more users who engage with content and ads, the easier it is to recruit premium advertisers and command higher CPMs. Individualizing content is key to driving revenue, but the industry has a long way to go.

Engagement Channels & Tactics Deployed:

Website



Mobile website



Mobile app



Mobile PWA



Email newsletter



SMS newsletter



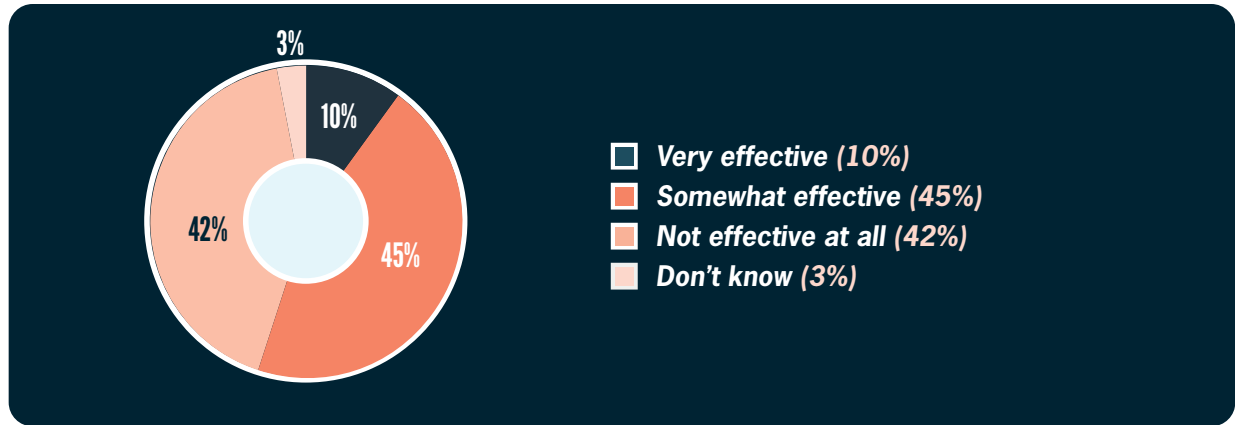
Push notifications



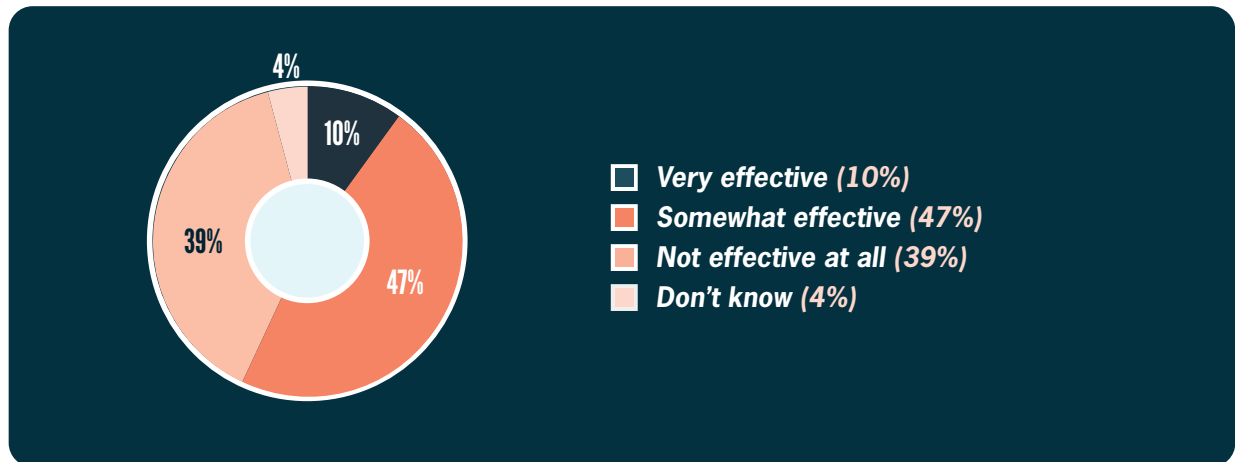
Other (CTV, CTV app, etc.)



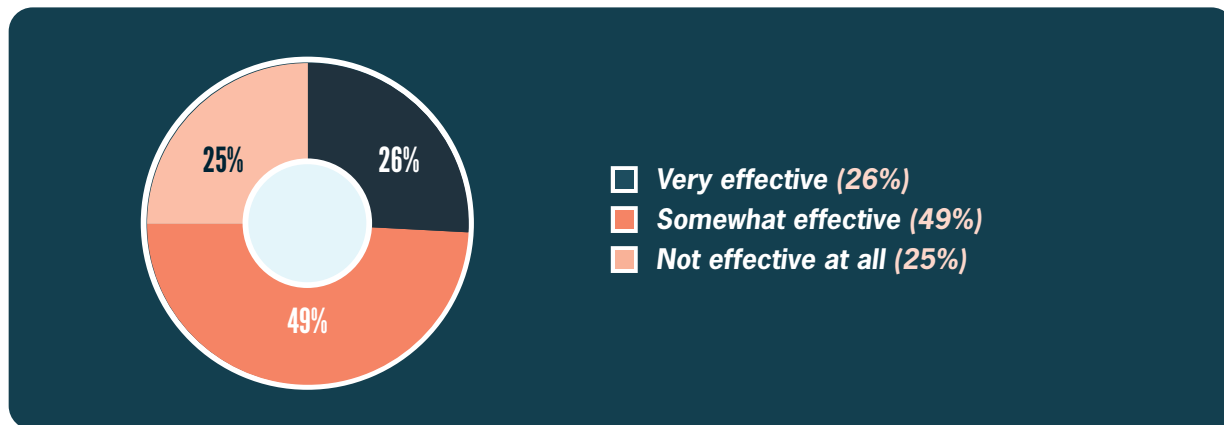
Personalized content is recognized as an effective way to engage and re-engage users. Yet only 10% of respondents say their organizations are effective at leveraging their first-party data to personalize content to individual users. More worrisome given the impending demise of the third-party tracking cookie, 45% say their organizations are largely ineffective at using their first-party data.



Individualized content can also be used to re-engage dormant or intermittent users, but it appears publishers have yet to seize this opportunity to the fullest extent possible. **We asked how effectively does their organization use first-party data to re-engage users. We heard:**



First-party data reveals a great deal of insight about a publisher's users, which they can then use to attract more premium advertisers to their sites. We see some progress in publishers using it effectively to attract advertisers to their properties, but there is still a long way to go. **When we asked how effectively does their organization use first-party data to attract advertisers, we heard:**



The good news is that operationalizing first-party data will be a priority for publishers, as the majority (67%) of respondents say their companies have plans to engage new partners and acquire new tools so that they can better deploy their first-party data.

TIP: Publishers can better utilize their first-party behavioral data to create lookalike audiences or buckets of users as a starting point of their content-individualization initiative. Ask: What are the quadrants of users who engage with our site, and how do they travel through and consume our content? Are there categories of interest that lead users to engage with other, seemingly unrelated topics? This exercise will reveal where publishers should invest more time in terms of content generation and advertising sales.

All publishers should create graphs of the user journeys—from a first-time visit to re-engagement via SMS, email or a push notification—in order to breakdown silos and obtain a more holistic view of their audiences.

5. HOW PUBLISHERS COLLECT FIRST-PARTY DATA

Publishers have unique opportunities to generate first-party data on their users, from site registration, to onsite user behavior (articles consumed, videos watched, ads clicked on) and newsletter signups. **How do publishers collect their first-party data? 60% of survey respondents report that they ask their readers to register for their sites, providing them access to deterministic first-party data, including:**

Customer demographics (gender, household income, presence of children) collected at registration



Customer interests disclosed at registration



Data that comes from measurement providers (e.g., time spent engaging with an ad)



Other sources of rich first-party include:

Survey and quizzes



Customer interest based on behavior (type of articles read, ads clicked, newsletter sign-ups, ecommerce sales)



Data that comes from measurement providers (e.g., time spent engaging with an ad)



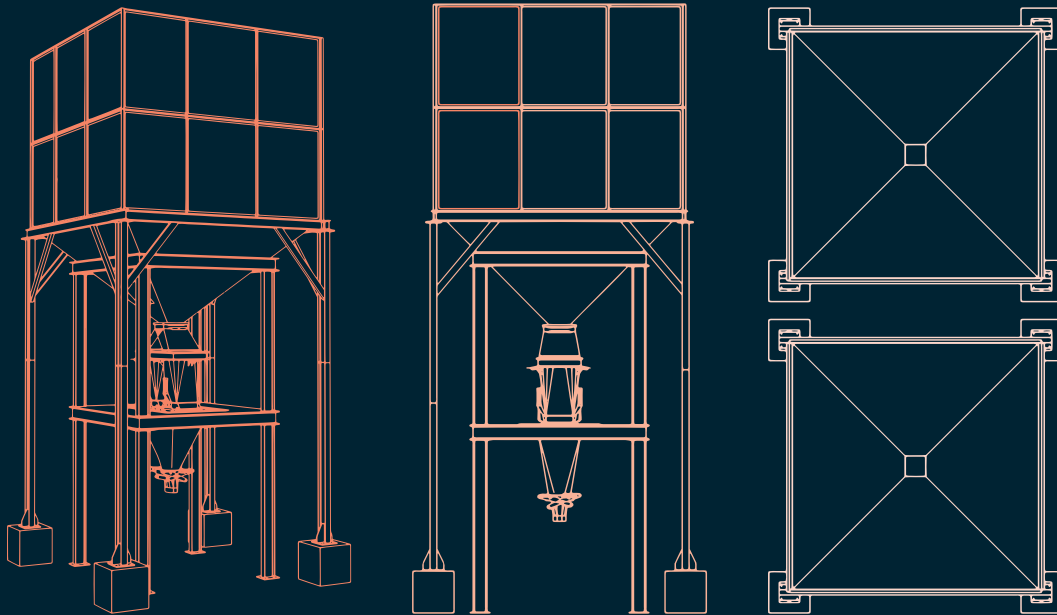
Contextual data (e.g., interests based on content consumed)



TIP.

Don't be afraid to ask users for their first-party data in exchange for something of value to them, such as an email newsletter that's individualized to their interests. Consumers are willing to share data, as long as it feels organic to the way they experience a site.

The key is to ask for small bits of data over time, starting with a user's email address or SMS number. As the relationship grows, publishers can ask for more information, such as demographic, household or interest data.



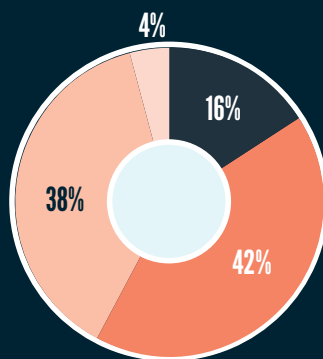
6. STATE OF DATA SHARING WITHIN THE PUBLISHER'S ORGANIZATION

Although publishers collect rich data about their users, it's not widely shared throughout the organization, resulting in a negative impact on the publisher's bottom line.

67% of respondents said that if they had access to the complete range of first-party data collected by their organizations they would be better able to generate revenue in the channels for which they are responsible.

The reasons for the data silos? Resources and privacy considerations. 62% of respondents said they lack the resources and tools, including data scientists and BI dashboards, they need to use their first-party data as desired.

Privacy is also a concern, as over half of respondents (58%) say they are somewhat or significantly concerned about privacy and using their first-party data:



- Yes, I have significant concerns about the use of our first-party data (16%)
- I have some concerns, but not enough to prevent the use of our first-party data (42%)
- I have full confidence in the use of our first-party data due to the processes and systems we've put in place (38%)
- Don't know (4%)

We asked respondents how they plan to use their organization's first-party data in the future. Here's what they said:

To better customize the content and ads our users see



To create a more harmonized experience across all channels



To better match advertisers to users on our properties



These responses tell us that publishers have a keen interest in providing an ad experience that is more individualized. We also see that coordinating individualized content across all touch points will create more harmony between the content, the user and their overall experiences.

TIP.

Content personalization is the publisher's best opportunity to keep users loyal to their sites and drive revenue. Technology can bridge the gap if an organization is unable to break down its first-party data silos.

There are plenty of great partners, AI and tools to help publishers merge their first-party data with the contextual data signals users generate as they interact with articles, images, videos and ads. All of these signals can be harnessed to infer which content to present next to each user.

This inference should span channels. For instance, readers who have a propensity to read articles about a specific NBA team clearly have an interest in that topic. Rather than limit that individualized content to the website only, the publisher can present content about that team in the email newsletters, and the push notifications that appear on users' mobile devices.

The same should be true for advertising, although for many publishers, there is a technical hurdle to clear. It's easy enough for publishers that use Google Ad Manager to create harmonized ad experiences between their web and mobile properties, but that ad server doesn't extend to email or SMS advertising. Again, there are tools on the market that can bridge that gap, enabling one ad serving process to reach all customer touch points.

7. THE IDEAL STATE: CHANNEL HARMONIZATION

Consumers are famously impatient with publishers and brands that fail to recognize them across their multiple devices. They expect a seamless cross-channel user experience, and survey respondents tend to agree.

But what does that look like exactly? And how can that experience be enhanced if publishers achieved full cross-channel harmonization?

We began by asking survey respondents how they defined an ideal cross-channel user experience. Here's what they said:

Users see articles/content/ads likely to be of interests, in all channels, based on past interactions with our brand



Users see articles/content/ads we predict to be of interest based on profiles we create



Users receive special offers from our partners, regardless of interest



TIP: User graphs are essential to mapping an individual user's multiple identities—IP address, email address, MAID, SMS number—in order to coordinate individualized content. If your organization doesn't deploy an internal user graph, work with a partner that can help you build one.

Clearly, presenting content (articles, ads, offers) of interest defines a cross-channel experience, but a truly harmonized experience goes beyond content, and gets closer to what the consumer has in mind. **When asked to define what a harmonized cross-channel experience entails, we heard:**

Users have the same level of opportunity (e.g., search functions, special promotions) across all channels



Users see consistent content of interest across all channels



A preference expressed in one channel is automatically reflected in all others



Users see coordinated content across all channels, whether they have an interest in it or not



TIP: Many publishers start with grouping users into cohorts and presenting content based on those personas. While that's a good start, AI can be deployed to take it to the next level, delivering one-to-one content and ads that are fully customized to the individual user.

When users take the time to express their preferences in one channel, they expect to see those choices reflected across all other touch points, and are impatient with publishers that fail to do so. If your site is unable to reflect those choices universally, find a partner that can help your organization achieve that goal.

What is the impact of cross-channel harmonization on user behavior?

Reminds users why they like our brand



Prompts users to spend more time on our properties



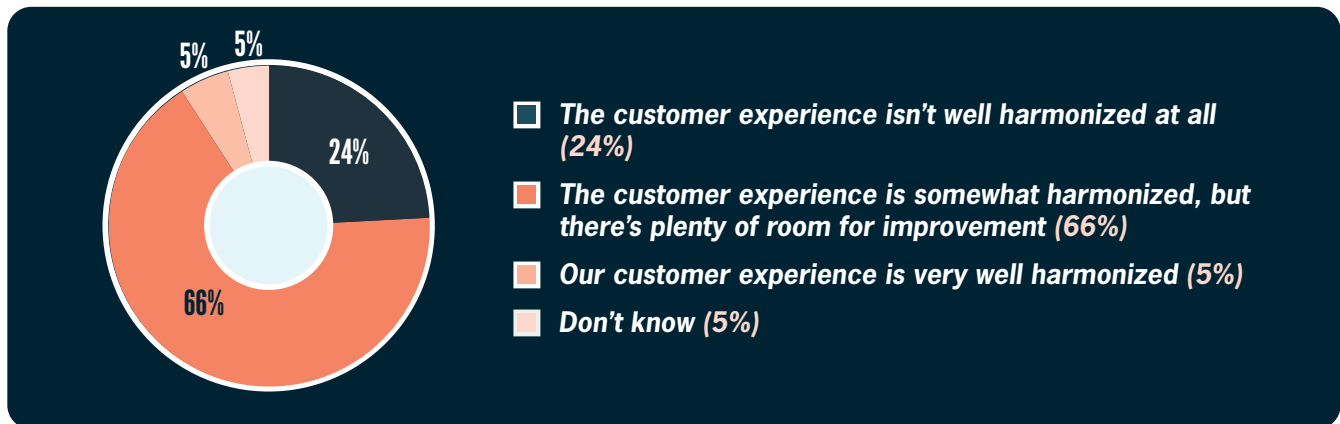
Leads to more ad revenue opportunities for our brand



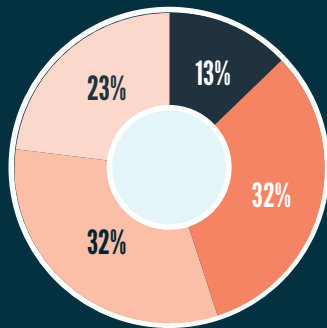
Increases likelihood of users recommending our publication to others



How close are publishers to the ideal of fully harmonized cross-channel experiences? We see some progress being made, but there's still a long way to go. **We asked respondents to rate how well harmonized their user experiences are. Here's what we heard:**

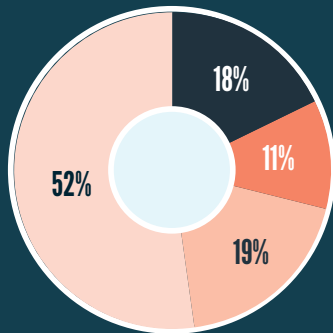


Despite years of the ad industry espousing the importance of eliminating data silos, they still abound. When we asked respondents whether they work with departments to create harmonized cross-channel user experiences (e.g., ensure that an email newsletter recommends the same content the user has demonstrated an interest in) **we heard that cross-departmental collaboration is rare.**



- I always work with other departments to create such experiences (13%)
- I sometimes work with other departments, but there's room for improvement (32%)
- I rarely work with other departments to create such experiences (32%)
- I never work with other teams when planning the experience users will have in my channel (23%)

What's getting in their way? Lack of data, data silos, and competing goals:



- My team doesn't have access to the data it needs to create a fully harmonized customer experience (18%)
- The data I need to ensure my channel is harmonized exists within my company, but it's not shared with me (11%)
- The data exists, but it's not in a format I can easily use (19%)
- Every channel has its own goals and KPIs, making it difficult to create a harmonized, cross-channel experience (52%)

TIP- *It's common for content, editorial and advertising departments to have conflicting KPIs. To enhance the user experience, however, these departments should work closely together to consider the user experience each department wants to achieve, look for common ground, and find ways to mirror or support that vision across all touch points. Branding—and the vision a publisher wants to present to the world—will be the unifying factor. At the end of the day, a positive brand experience is one that is unified and cohesive across all touch points.*

CREATIVE NATIVE AD EXPERIENCES

Every channel should include native experiences for its advertising components, as well as ensure that it strikes the right balance between the ads that appear and the content that's generated by the publisher. All choices should be purposeful.

This requires some consideration of the handoff between departments. In some cases, the advertising team may be dependent on the content team to embed their ads across all channels. Rather than simply hand it off, the teams should ask: how can we make this a more harmonious experience?

Some publishers have tight coordination between the editorial and advertising teams, so that the ads that appear around the content are very relevant. Other, more niche-oriented publishers naturally attract advertisers with a focus in their sector, meaning that coordination between content and advertising happens automatically.

Relevancy gets more difficult with more general sites that attract a broad spectrum of users. Many publishers deploy AI to assess the interests of individual users based on their behaviors, and make decisions as to which articles and ads to show based on a range of signals users generate

8. THE PLAYBOOK

- 1. Focus on your high-level vision of the brand experiences you want for your users, and how that applies across all channels.**
- 2. Don't be afraid to ask users to disclose their email address or SMS number so that you can send them content of interest going forward. Many users are willing to share their data as long as they perceive a value from your content.**
- 3. Ask for additional data in a progressive manner. Users who sign up for your email newsletter and have high open rates clearly feel comfortable with your brand. That comfort level presents an opportunity for you to ask for more information, such as their demographics, household status, interests or any other data point that will help you further individual their experiences.**
- 4. Combine consumer-disclosed data with all the first-party data users generate as they interact with your channels. The articles they read, ads they click on, time spent engaging with specific content categories all provide vital insight you can use to individualize every aspect of their experience with your brand.**
- 5. Use the signals from behavior to create personalized reader-interest graphs for each user.**
- 6. If you haven't already done that invest the time and resources into understanding the cohorts and the individualization of those users. Next, consider how to provide your advertising network with access to those cohorts for targeting purposes. The result will be harmonization between content and advertising.**
- 7. If your organization faces challenges in sharing data between departments and channels, find an AI solution that can assess the interests of each user, and deliver an individualized experience across all channels. This will increase engagement and revenues.**

9. ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Types of Publisher	
Business	8%
Sports	10%
Lifestyle	13%
Entertainment	18%
General	12%
Tech	8%
Financial	10%
Other	21%

Size of Organizations Based Number of Employees	
1 to 49	14%
50 to 499	41%
500 to 999	20%
1,000 to 4,999	5%
5,000+	20%

Respondent Seniority	
C-suite	5%
Vice President	23%
Director	44%
Manager	18%
Other	10%

Types of Publisher	
Ad Operations	64%
Ad Sales	5%
Marketing	3%
Data science	3%
Business analyst	3%
User experience	2%
Client/advertiser success	5%
Audience relations	2%
Other (CRO, programmatic analysis, product management)	13%



The global leader in strategic insight on the future of digital media and advertising technology. Through our conferences, website, and original research, we offer unparalleled in-person experiences and unique, high-quality content focused on media operations, monetization, technology, strategy, platforms and trends. We provide a forum to share best practices, explore new technology platforms and build relationships.

AdMonsters has built its reputation on providing objective editorial leadership based on deep, real-world expertise. We have continued to evolve our editorial strategy to address the changing needs of the market and, as a result, AdMonsters has attracted a highly focused audience who are at the forefront of the industry, and leading marketing partners have found AdMonsters to be a powerful channel to reach these decision makers. Today, our portfolio of integrated media solutions includes industry-leading live events, our innovative Connect content solutions, email marketing programs, and more. AdMonsters is part of the **Access Intelligence** family of companies.

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Jeeng provides the only personalized, automated, multichannel messaging solution built exclusively for publishers to help them engage audiences and build direct, 1:1 relationships with subscribers. With Jeeng, publishers can end their dependence on third-party cookies, search and social platforms to build their own first-party data strategy and drive organic traffic. By giving publishers the ability to own their own audiences, Jeeng helps publishers drive new revenue with relevant, targeted content recommendations.

Jeeng's unique AI engine, Jeengage, curates publisher's content, matches the right content to the right subscriber, and distributes it automatically over the right channel—including email and push notifications. Publishers can even monetize the messages they send with Jeeng's direct GAM integration and AdFill solution. All it takes is a single line of code embedded into a publisher's site and Jeeng goes to work, giving publishers a simple, affordable, AI-driven solution to maximize audience engagement

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