Web Users Demand Control Over Ad Targeting

Contributed by eMarketer
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Education about ad targeting can create more fear

Internet users have been sending mixed messages about their attitudes toward targeted ads: They sometimes say they appreciate the relevance targeting brings; they sometimes indicate they would be willing to provide personal information to facilitate targeting; and they also report concerns about advertisers and publishers having too much data.

While some of these mixed messages suggest consumers may be confused about online privacy and what behavioral targeting entails, research from online ad preference management provider PreferenceCentral calls into question whether consumer education is a solution for marketers.

Asked if they would prefer to pay for content, view targeted advertisements in exchange for free content, or receive limited free content supported by untargeted ads, 58% of US internet users chose targeted ads.

But their willingness to receive those types of ads decreased after they became more educated about how behavioral targeting worked.

Nearly half of internet users said awareness of behavioral targeting did not change their comfort level.

But only 14% became more comfortable with education, while twice as many said they were less so.

Their reduced comfort level changed the trade-offs internet users were willing to make to get content.

After behavioral targeting education, 50% of users preferred to receive limited content and avoid targeting, compared with 37.3% who remained willing to be targeted in exchange for fully free content.

Putting control into usersâ€™ hands over the types of ads served and the types of information used for targeting, however, restored a higher level of comfort with targeted ads.

Education without effective empowerment with regard to their own data may not be enough for consumers to get comfortable with targeting.

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