



The B2B marketer's guide to the

COOKIELESS FUTURE



Cookieless advertising is about to turn B2B marketing on its head. Brands will soon lose access to a key feature in tracking and targeting audiences — resulting in fewer leads, decreased brand awareness and even a loss in revenue.



But it's not all doom and gloom. There's an opportunity for the quick movers to make the most of the cookieless future, and we're here to help you seize it.

Scroll on for critical information about what the cookieless future means for marketers, guidance on how to get prepared for the switch-off, and tips on reaching your audience without the use of cookies.



Cookie

– COMPUTING

A packet of data sent by a web server to a browser, which is returned by the browser each time it subsequently accesses the same server, used to identify the user or track their access to the server.

noun

plural noun: cookies

– MARKETING

Advertisers and marketers use cookies to gather information about users' online behaviour and preferences, helping them deliver more relevant and targeted ads.



Cookies have been a bedrock of the B2B advertising industry for years, used extensively for data analytics, attribution, measurement, and targeting and segmentation. Currently, most advertising and analytics platforms use cookies to track users on a website — mapping out a prospect's digital journey from start to finish.

DIGITAL ADVERTISING IN B2B TODAY

A few common examples of how cookies are used include:

- Tracking when a user has visited a website before
- Targeting users who have visited a website
- Identifying which ads users have seen before downloading a white paper
- Understanding how different advertising channels contribute to conversion signups

2021

2024

However, concerns over privacy have prompted the biggest tech companies to review the way that cookies are used across the internet. The good news is, this isn't the first time this has happened and there are some solutions to help adapt. In 2021, Apple got rid of cookies, moving to IDFA (ID for advertisers).

This time around Google is joining the party - by the end of 2024 they will be ditching all third party (tracking) cookies that are being used.

The digital advertising landscape is about to undergo quite a significant shift. It's been the on-again-off-again question of the last few years:

How are brands going to adapt when cookies finally go the way of the dodo?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR B2B BRANDS IN THE SHORT TERM?



This will have a big effect on B2B brands everywhere. But you're likely going to feel the impact in two key ways — in your analytics and targeting.

The current methodology for measuring effectiveness is built largely around the use of cookie-based attribution, so the impact on digital advertising will arguably be more significant than the introduction of GDPR in 2018.



The impact on analytics

The first big impact that brands are going to feel is how they successfully measure and attribute individual channels, particularly where multi-touch efforts are required. The biggest impact will be for channels such as display, native, video, content and social, where they are not necessarily last touch conversion drivers.

To combat this, brands will need to really focus on developing a measurement framework that allows them greater visibility. As you may suspect, a lot of this focuses on being able to control first party data, and what the industry calls “identity solutions”.

The other potential impact is to any personalisation efforts on your website, as well as progressive profiling. There will need to be an evolution of thinking about how we can still deliver meaningful experiences to users despite the absence of personalised advertising.

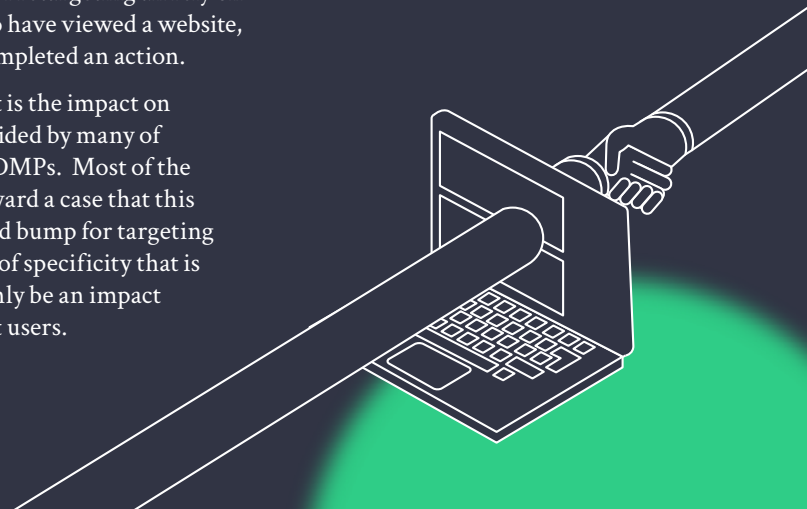


The impact on targeting

Targeting is the other big challenge that advertisers will need to address. Cookies have been used for years in online targeting.

The immediate and most broadly felt impact will be retargeting. Current methods of retargeting all rely on cookie-based tactics, users who have viewed a website, been on a particular page or completed an action.

The second way this will be felt is the impact on third party data segments provided by many of the big programmatic DSPs & DMPs. Most of the big data providers will put forward a case that this isn't a death knell, rather a speed bump for targeting in this way, and given the level of specificity that is available now there will certainly be an impact to how brands are able to target users.



WHAT ARE OTHER B2B BRANDS DOING?



60%

As it turns out, around 60% of marketers think that the loss of cookies will be disruptive to their marketing strategy. Despite this, a lot of them are still yet to make any moves to course correct.

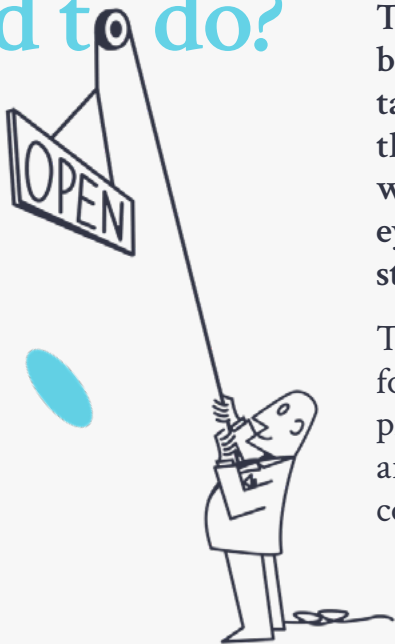
We think there's a couple of reasons driving this.

First, GDPR 'fizzling out' is probably a core driver — we heard that it was going to be a game changer, but all it did was force companies to tighten up how they treat customer data, something that was probably long overdue and beyond that - as advertisers not much has really changed.

Second, there is no immediate replacement, so most advertisers have buried their heads in the sand.

The strategy for cookieless advertising needs greater consideration, all hope is not lost - there are some big opportunities for brands that get their acts together and those who are prepared to move ahead of their competitors.

What's a brand to do?



The good news is that this has (sort of) happened before. When Apple removed cookie based targeting, advertisers were forced to adapt their online strategies. Plus, we've known this was coming for a while – giving those with an eye on tomorrow a chance to test some new strategies and develop effective alternatives.

There are some immediate tactics that exist for advertisers that are already showing great promise. There are also a few obvious work-arounds and tactics that can be deployed to continue to drive digital advertising success.

First party data will become more important than ever

Everyone's talking about first party data for a reason. In the absence of cookies, it's going to become increasingly important to find other ways to retarget a web visitor.

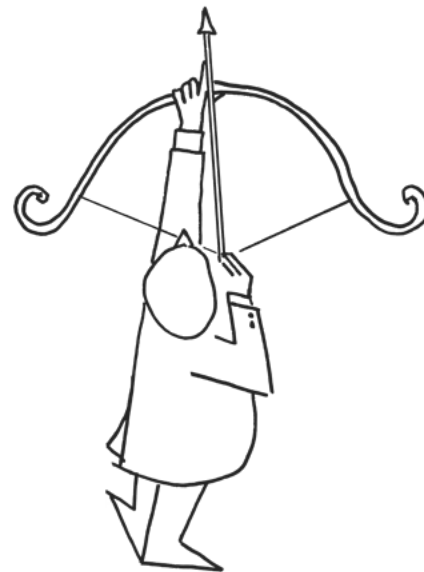
It'll become more about building a strategy that focuses on capturing first party data, as well as activating that data effectively. First-party data is data that is collected about a user directly by your brand, as opposed to data that is collected by other parties or on other platforms.

When you own the data, you're able to communicate directly with prospects. So brands will need to shift focus to identifying customers and devising a plan for communicating with them.

But the challenge doesn't finish just by collecting prospective customer data, it will also require a strategy that ensures there is value exchanged in return for prospects giving the data.

Crucially, considerations around your first party data strategy also extends to working with the right publishers and partners. Top tier publishers and media owners have rich data sets that enable precise targeting when users are signed in.

When planning media with trade press, global media businesses and the like, it's important to understand what kind of data they use so it can be carefully evaluated for relevancy and effectiveness. Using someone else's first party data may not be as good as having it yourself, but it does give you a powerful tool to reach audiences that are relevant for your business.



Embrace the walled gardens

The next tactic will be to utilise the walled gardens, more commonly known as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok, and even – dare we say it – X.

Depending on your objectives, all of these channels bring great opportunities to the table. LinkedIn is the obvious B2B channel given the rich business data that exists there, and targeting on the platform can be extremely precise. Similarly, Facebook and Instagram can often show themselves as useful B2B channels with effective data relevant for most businesses.

The key benefit of using social platforms in marketing is the data they can provide about the customer, their buying habits and their preferences. But like any channel, brands need to be sure that they're giving prospective customers the right messages and content that will drive effectiveness.

It's also necessary to be mindful that, while the data is accurate, the cookieless future means that the tracking we have long since relied upon may now become less effective than ever — particularly when we consider the cross-channel impact.



Imagine if you could target your advertising so precisely that as someone is reading an article about cyber security, you could promote your insurance product servicing the cyber market. Sound familiar? It should. This technology is already available and has been something we've been actively testing as an agency with great results.

Contextual advertising allows us to target a selection of topics that our audiences are interested in and ensure that ads appear alongside it. This is a service that's offered by a wide variety of demand side platforms (DSP) already. The success of this approach can vary greatly depending on how it's used.

In short, when done strategically, this is an approach that not only makes sense, but also makes good. After all, prospects interested in cybersecurity are predisposed to be receptive to advertising about cybersecurity.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also helping publishers and DSPs alike categorise and manage contextual targeting, and given the rate of growth that we've seen in the AI field recently, this is a technology that will only continue to improve.

Explore contextual targeting



Look at the newer privacy focussed technologies

Google is at the forefront of developing new ways to measure and inform success and are currently testing a new suite of functions through the Privacy Sandbox.

A collaboration between partners across the industry provides a way of “limiting tracking of individuals and providing safer alternatives to existing technology on these platforms while keeping them open and accessible to everyone.”

This approach will try and fill the void left by cookies, essentially providing alternative methodologies to allow businesses to measure success for conversion, attribution for users while not parsing any identifiable information.

Advertising isn't going anywhere, users know ads are the price of admission for browsing on the internet, so there is a market for them to see more relevant ads, as well as the advertisers finding the most relevant users.



Think outside the box

It's no secret that there are very few new ideas. And this is excuse enough for a select few marketers who have welcomed an unimaginative standard, relying on a few banners and search ads to try and sell their brands. However, aside from being completely unimpressive, the reality is that this approach doesn't always meet the needs of your audience.

Effective and creative marketers need to think laterally, beyond the traditional, to drive success. As a brand, it's important to explore some new and unassuming areas. One area that has proved extremely effective in recent months is what we term as "community social." Platforms like Reddit & Quora we have been able to see fantastic results & great engagement. Most of our clients are using them as a secret weapon in their strive for B2B marketing excellence. Where is your audience hanging out online? What are they discussing, what do they care about? What are they reading? If you don't know the answers to these questions, it's time to find out.

It doesn't just stop there. We've broadly accepted the same channels over and over - but especially today there are a plethora of ways to capture attention and imagination. In the last 12 months we've looked at original event activations, direct mail pieces, we even got sign off to mow a client's logo into a field.

Not everything needs to be digital, not everything needs to be digital, but it better stand out if you want to make an impact. If you want to stand out you better start thinking outside the box.

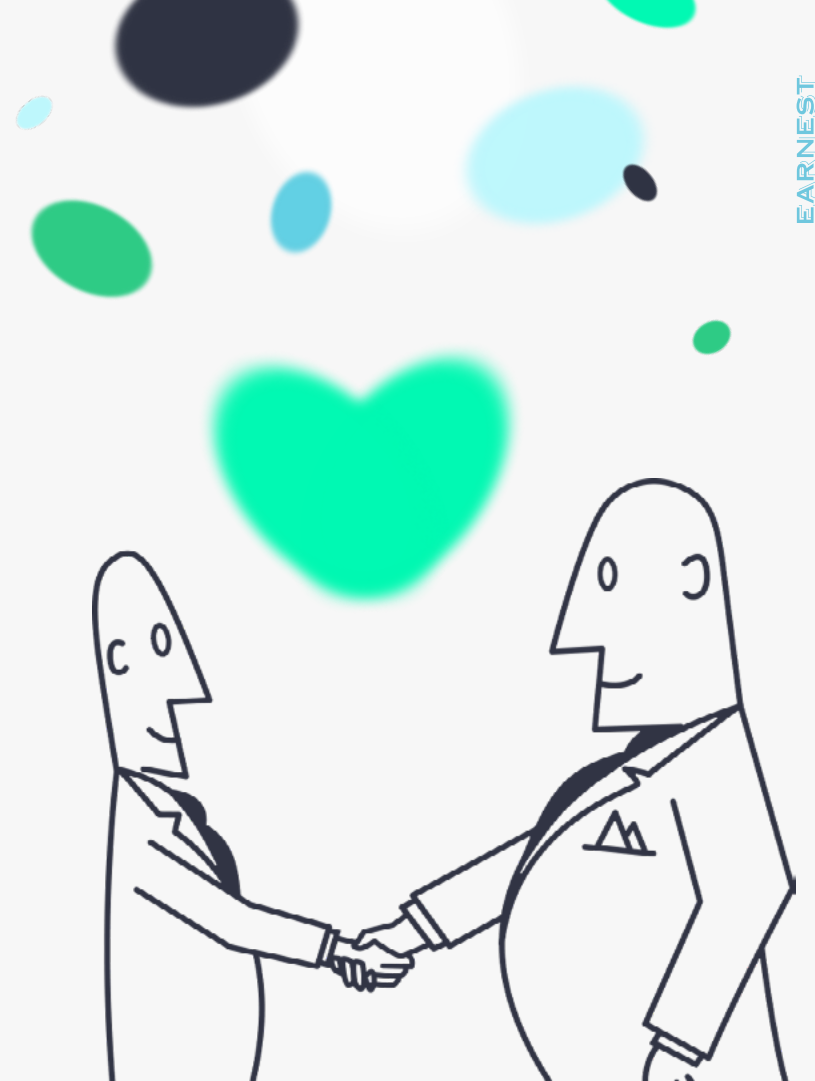


Building partnerships to target a broader audience.

In the spirit of thinking laterally - this is a chance to start thinking about a broader audience. What partnerships make sense for your business - are there influencers perhaps who can help get the message out? Influencers you say...no we're not talking about reality TV "stars" who had their 30 seconds of fame.

Who in your industry is making noises that you should be speaking to? How can you hero your customers to help tell your stories? Ericson ran an extremely effective campaign that relied heavily on corporate "influencers". By reaching out to a mix of trail-blazing thought leaders, and existing customers doing amazing things they were able to help promote the benefits of their 5G products and provide real-world outcomes, unleashing the power of the customer. This campaign caught fire — helping ignite the imagination of the industry and generated success metrics well above client targets.

Partnerships don't just stop here there are limitless opportunities to look at businesses in complementary industries, partners, distributors in unexpected places, partners who can help co-promote content to their own audience.



THE BIGGER QUESTIONS



Cookieless advertising is a short-term shock, but it's still just one part of the whole story. Companies that have focused on getting the fundamentals of marketing right will be well insulated.

Now is the time for marketers to think more holistically and how they're promoting their brand in market. And this means big picture thinking.

How strong is my B2B brand?

Companies with solid branding are more likely to see greater sales growth and greater effectiveness through marketing campaigns. Academics like Byron Sharp have published extensively on the idea of mental availability – the idea that if customers are familiar with your brand and already thinking about it will be the ones that customers choose.

You don't necessarily need to be a well known, consumer-facing business to have a strong brand. You'd be forgiven for thinking that it's the big players like Apple, Coca-Cola and Nike who have a monopoly, but it's not strictly true.

Too many B2B marketers have gotten hooked on performance marketing and lead generation. But customers today are more interested in what the brand is, and how it's able to help solve problems, rather than this quarter's lacklustre whitepaper.

Lead generation is a critical part of marketing, and strong content pieces remain an important and sturdy backbone of effective marketing. But the idea that “performance” is owned by those claiming the last touch interaction in their attribution is sadly misguided. All marketing efforts need to be thought of as performance. From those building brand awareness, to those creating demand and ultimately, yes, those driving leads.

The change to cookieless is an opportunity for brands to analyse their marketing strategy and evaluate if they're really working through the full funnel, and if not, how they can start investing in their brand to really move the needle with their prospective customers.



What is the value exchange with my customers?



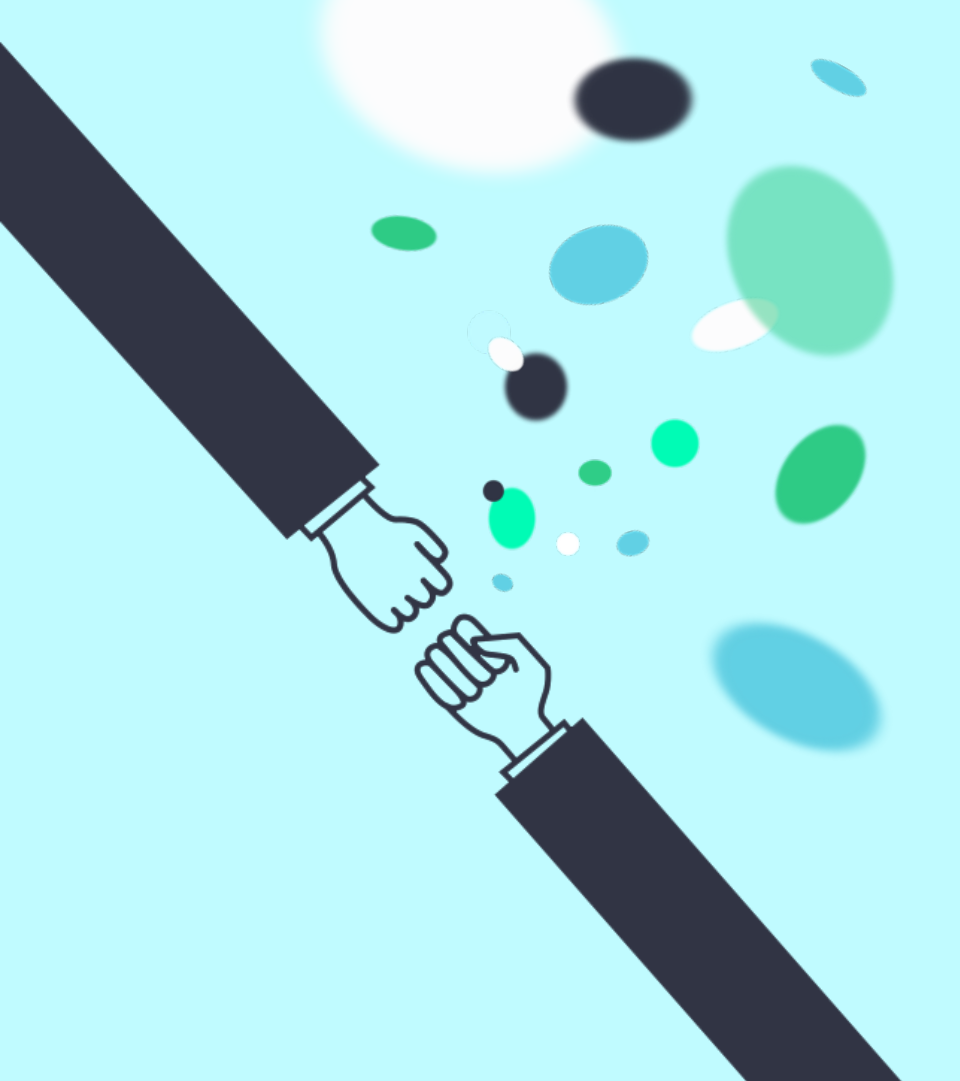
Following on from the importance of a strong brand, cookieless advertising also needs to be an opportunity for brands to look critically at the value exchange that they have with prospective customers.

Too many brands are guilty of impatience when it comes to lead generation strategies. There's an unfortunate truth that needs to be told. Just because someone has downloaded the whitepaper doesn't mean they're ready for a sales call. They are however interested in what you have to say, and inviting you to tell them more about how you can help them.

Your prospective customers are probably not interested in the newest platform features, or your proprietary methodology.

Another widely held research finding is the idea that 95% of your customers are NOT in market for your products at any given time. So if you focus on selling to everyone who downloads a content guide, attends a webinar, or likes a LinkedIn post things are going pear shaped quickly.



An illustration of two hands shaking, symbolizing a deal or agreement. The hands are rendered in a simple, stylized manner with dark outlines. The background is a light blue gradient with various colored bokeh spots in shades of green, blue, and white, creating a vibrant and modern aesthetic.

Let's break this down a little further

In looking at the value exchange, you first need to give prospects a reason to engage. A sales deck masquerading as a 'white paper' is not going to generate interest, and actually will have the opposite of the desired effect. Brands need to provide innovative thinking, a point of view that a prospect hasn't thought of.

As users, we think long and hard about trading my personal details for anything that won't give me expected value (and hope we make the right decisions before it's too late). The notion of "help don't sell" is true for a reason. Users will come back to brands who are helpful and insightful, who are true industry leaders. Not those trying to peddle their wares under a guise of "thought leadership".

So, it's important to consider if we're trying to capture leads, are you:

Clearly articulating
the topic of the webinar/
white-paper/report
to customers?

Not using
this as a sales
trojan horse?

Consistent with
our brand values in
promoting content?

Ensuring that this is
something that our
audience wants to
hear about?

Really helping
answer a problem
that our customers
are feeling?

Trying to make
a quick buck?
Customers see right
through this.

Part of this all plays back into the idea that you're more likely to trust a strong brand. If customers are aware of both who you are and what you stand for, you're more likely to succeed.



The second question we need to ask ourselves as marketers is: what does the prospect experience look like post enquiry? They've downloaded a whitepaper out of sheer curiosity, what next?

The most common mistake is rushing to close the sale. It's such an interesting phenomenon, we know that there is a minimum of eight touch points before a contact becomes a lead, but so many of us always rush to try and schedule a demo, try and pitch our credentials or arrange a one-hour discovery with our sales technician.

Brands need to be realistic, unless you're selling free money, you're not closing on the first email. Instead, create a clear customer journey to nurture those interested prospects into qualified leads.

What are our customers
biggest pain points?

What is their industry
worried about?

What is their industry
talking about?

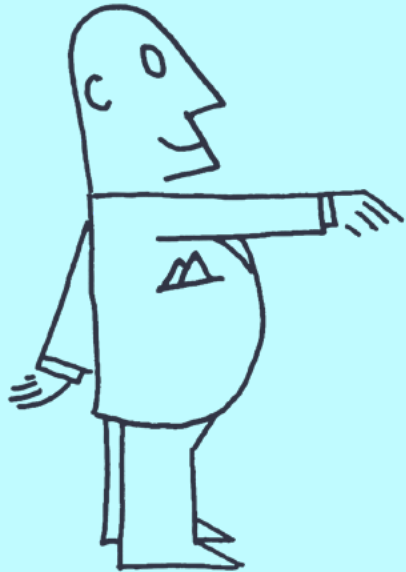
What is going to grab
their attention?

As marketers we need to ask ourselves:

If they're getting a dozen sales
approaches a day like the rest of us
- what are you doing to stand out?

What are you talking about, thinking
about, sharing with your customers
that is valuable, unique and going to
convince them to have a conversation?

There is a rule in email marketing, for every four informative emails that you send a prospect, you can send one **soft sell** and one **hard sell** email.



So, do you have a dozen interesting pieces of content that will enable you to nurture a prospect enough to ask for a conversation?

Are you helping solve my problems or selling your product?

In a world where information access is near perfect, and your prospective clients aren't idiots, you better be bringing something to the table to try and close the sale.

Is my creative firing on all cylinders?

Everyone knows that creativity is worth its salt. We know the value of investing in creative that will be effective. There are piles of research that highlight the importance of having ads and messaging that cuts through the noise, that lands our message and that gets our audience excited. Why then do so few (unfortunately especially B2B) brands invest in developing truly effective creative?

In today's world of bland, stock photography and generic messaging standing out has never been more important. In a world without cookies, and all of the targeting that is available today, creative will, in our opinion, become perhaps the most important factor in a campaigns success.



Checklist

- ✓ **Does our creative work across screens?**
- ✓ **Does our strategy have clear messaging?**
- ✓ **Are we effectively communicating the benefits of your brand or product?**
- ✓ **Are we actually solving your audience's problems?**
- ✓ **Does the campaign creative really stand out?**
- ✓ **Is there a distinct point of view that we're communicating?**
- ✓ **Do we have a test and learn strategy?**

The impact of effectiveness

The B2B brands that will thrive without cookies are the ones who embrace the creative opportunity. There are a number of key points to ensuring a campaign hits the right notes to be effective. As advertising great David Ogilvy said, 'if it didn't sell, it wasn't creative.'



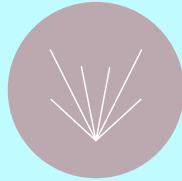
Audience

The first step on the journey is always understanding who the audience is. Work out the personas of our target audience that we're trying to reach, understand their pain points, and how you can speak directly to them.



Messaging

Land on a single or set of key messages that you're trying to nail with your campaign. Ensuring that your messaging is on point, considered and resonates with the audience is a real key here.



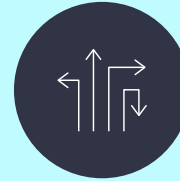
Impact

Your ads and content placement really needs to cut through the sea of sameness. Consider how to communicate your message using emotion or humour.



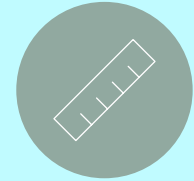
USP

Have we defined a clear USP, is this something that we can own. Are we being distinctive in what we're saying - or are we putting out just another faceless ad - that could fit alongside any competitor.



User journey

A memorable ad is only half the challenge. It's crucial to make sure that there's a clear path through to the next steps. This is all about guiding the user from the ad, to a piece of content, and from the content to a form fill.



Measurement

Carefully consider the framework you're implementing for successfully measuring the campaign performance. Think about how you can be testing, learning and feeding the information back into the campaign.

MAKE THE RIGHT MOVES TODAY



It might seem like there's a lot to consider, and that's because there is. But there are some easy steps you can take to get ahead of the game today, and ensure you're all set for when cookies come to an end.

What can I do today?



Analytics

- Are my online analytics platforms properly set up?
- How are we collecting first party data?
- Are we tracking which content is most engaging on the website?
- Are you ready with an updated attribution model to gauge impact across channels?



Campaign Targeting

- Do I know everything about my audience online?
- What is the strategy with first party data?
- Do we have a CRM strategy?
- How are we leveraging data within advertising partners?
- Are we using contextual targeting most effectively?



Creative checklist?

- Is my creative answering my customer pain points?
- Does this creative clearly show my brand identity?
- Is my creative giving cut through for my messaging?



Marketing Checklist

- Is the user journey clear for my prospective customers?
- Is there a clear vision on what relationship I am trying to build?
- Are we clear about what the value exchange is between
- Do I have a clear test & learn plan across my audience?

What happens next



Cookieless is coming, and 60% of marketers know that it's going to become a problem. Fortunately, there are ways to deal with it.

The first thing you'll want to do is cookie-proof your analytics and measurement strategy by exploring new ways to reach your audience. For instance, think about contextual targeting and collecting valuable first-party data.

Next, strip it all back to basics, and think about the strength and health of your brand. Understand where your value lies for your customers, and explore opportunities to provide more. Customers should be pretty clear on why they should hand over their details – work out what's in it for them, and convey it effectively.

Finally, scrutinise your creative. Your brand and campaign creative should be working hard to communicate not only the benefits of your products and services, but also your brand sentiment. Are you memorable? Or impactful? If not, it's time to think about how to turn that around.

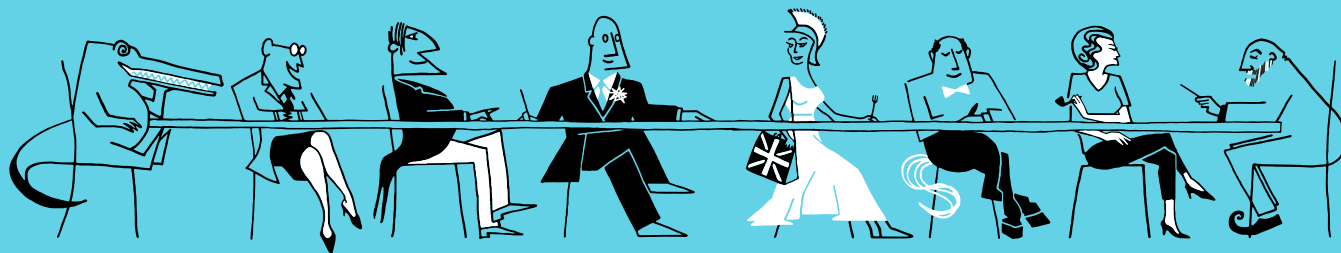
What a good read!



These are things we can help with at Earnest. If you're interested in discussing this further feel free to get in touch, and let's grab a coffee.

[Contact us today](#)

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