

2009 STUDY: CONSUMER ATTITUDES ABOUT BEHAVIORAL TARGETING

Sponsored by TRUSTe
Research independently conducted by TNS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Behavioral targeting has become a critical online trust issue. What do consumers think about having their browsing behaviors tracked for marketing purposes? For the second year in a row, TRUSTe and TNS surveyed consumer attitudes about behavioral targeting. Participants answered questions on their concerns and opinions about tracking issues, and the actions they take to protect their privacy.

The survey results found that most consumers consider privacy important enough to take steps to protect it. Many individuals know their behavior is being targeted, and they're uncomfortable with being tracked, even with the assurance of anonymity. Most are in favor of tools and features that control targeted advertising. Businesses have a stark choice: they can either increase transparency about their behavioral advertising practices or risk increasing consumer doubt and suspicion. Companies also need to treat personal information with respect and earn the right to deliver advertising based on behavior.

Half of all consumers are uncomfortable with advertisers using their browsing history to serve them relevant ads.

METHODOLOGY

The TRUSTe behavioral targeting survey was conducted online by TNS, a global market insight and information group. TNS randomly selected 3,660 American consumers, aged 18 and older, from among households that belong to the firm's online consumer panel. The sample was stratified by eight age/gender groups and each group was selected to be representative of online individuals of that age/gender on geographic division, market size, age, household income, and household size. Email invitations to complete the survey were sent to the panelists on February 5, 2009. When the survey was closed on February 13, a total of 1,008 respondents had completed it, and a further 139 individuals responded after the number of completes required for their age/gender group had been reached. The cooperation rate for the study was 31 percent and the completion rate was 28 percent. The survey data were weighted by region, market size, age, gender, and household size, composition and income, to reflect the demographic composition of the online adult population in the continental U.S. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the TNS consumer panel, rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

35% of respondents feel that their privacy has been invaded or violated in the last year due to information they provided on the Internet.

Up to 80% of respondents say that individuals and website owners are responsible for insuring individual online privacy.

42% would click a button or icon on a display ad that read "Click here to reduce unwanted ads."

RESULTS

Note: This year's statistics are compared with those of 2008 in the Supporting Data section.

Advertising Relevance

63.9% of respondents would choose to only see online ads from online stores and brands that they know and trust.

83.8% say that less than 25% of the ads they see while browsing online are relevant to their wants and needs. While this is a slight improvement from last year, online companies still have work to do in providing relevant advertising.

Awareness of Behavioral Targeting and Potential Threats

43.2% of respondents say they're familiar with the term "behavioral targeting", and 68.6% know that their browsing information may be collected by a third-party for advertising purposes.

Three quarters of consumers say they know how to protect their personal information online, yet 39% admit that they do not consistently take the necessary steps to do so.

34.9% feel their privacy has been invaded or violated in the last year due to information they provided on the Internet.

Attitudes Toward Behavioral Targeting

50.5% of respondents say they're uncomfortable with advertisers using their browsing history to serve relevant ads, even when that information cannot be tied to their names or any other personal information.

Only 30.6% said they would be comfortable having their browsing behavior captured by websites on which they've registered in order to improve user experience.

But as a whole, consumer discomfort with tracking has declined by six percent points year over year. This suggests that although consumers worry about protecting their private information online, they're getting used to behavioral targeting.

Intent to Take Specific Actions

Over half of respondents say that privacy is very important to them. Most think they know about the tools available and say they would take the necessary steps.

The same percentage said they would register online to prevent advertisers from tracking their browsing behaviors, even if it meant that they would receive more ads that they found less relevant.

84% say that less than a quarter of the ads they see while browsing online are relevant to their wants and needs.

68.4% say they'd use a browser feature that blocks ads, content and tracking code that doesn't originate from the site they're visiting.

53% say they would complete an anonymous survey about the products, services and brands they buy in order to limit the online ads they see to just those products, services and brands, but 18% would not.

34.3% would still fill out a survey about products, services and brands they buy, even if it wasn't anonymous.

Actions Taken

Over 36% of respondents said they do at least one of the following in order to surf the Internet anonymously:

- Use proxy surfing software
- Give fake name and contact info when requested by certain websites
- Use a Web browser with privacy settings that delete cookies and don't record a history of visited sites

KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Privacy protection remains overwhelmingly important to consumers.
- Consumers are aware their behavior is being targeted, and they're still uncomfortable about it.
- Consumers continue to ask for online advertising that's relevant to their wants and needs. They still don't think they're getting it, and are still annoyed when they get irrelevant ads.
- Consumers hold themselves and website owners more responsible for online privacy than they hold the government.

SUPPORTING DATA

1. I find online advertising intrusive and annoying when the products and services being advertised are not relevant to my wants and needs.		
	2009	2008
Strongly Agree	43.9%	47.8%
Agree Somewhat	27.8%	24.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.7%	17.9%
Disagree Somewhat	4.6%	4.7%
Strongly Disagree	2.2%	4.3%
Don't Know	0.8%	0.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
2. If I saw a button or icon on a display ad on a site that said "Click here to reduce unwanted ads," I would click it.		
Strongly Agree	20.2%	23.0%
Agree Somewhat	21.5%	20.7%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.3%	19.6%
Disagree Somewhat	14.0%	10.1%
Strongly Disagree	20.3%	22.1%
Don't Know	3.6%	4.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
3. I like seeing ads for coupons or promotions from online stores and brands that I have purchased from before.		
Strongly Agree	12.3%	13.9%
Agree Somewhat	32.1%	31.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	29.6%	26.4%
Disagree Somewhat	13.7%	11.3%
Strongly Disagree	11.0%	14.3%
Don't Know	1.3%	2.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
4. If given the option, I would choose to only see online ads from online stores and brands that I know and trust.		
Strongly Agree	26.9%	31.4%
Agree Somewhat	36.9%	32.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	24.2%	23.1%
Disagree Somewhat	6.9%	5.1%
Strongly Disagree	3.5%	5.6%
Don't Know	1.6%	1.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED

5. I would be willing to fill out an anonymous survey about the products, services and brands I purchase in order to limit the online ads I see to just those products, services and brands.		
	2009	2008
Strongly Agree	19.1%	19.9%
Agree Somewhat	34.1%	35.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26.8%	23.6%
Disagree Somewhat	11.0%	9.1%
Strongly Disagree	6.8%	9.8%
Don't Know	2.0%	2.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
6. I would be willing to fill out a survey about the products, services and brands I purchase in order to limit the online ads I see to just those products, services and brands, even if I had to provide personal contact information.		
Strongly Agree	10.4%	11.9%
Agree Somewhat	23.6%	24.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27.3%	22.2%
Disagree Somewhat	18.5%	17.6%
Strongly Disagree	18.8%	21.1%
Don't Know	1.4%	2.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
7. When I am online, I am aware that my browsing information may be collected by a third party for advertising purposes.		
Strongly Agree	30.1%	32.9%
Agree Somewhat	37.2%	37.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	17.3%	14.2%
Disagree Somewhat	6.6%	6.1%
Strongly Disagree	4.9%	6.5%
Don't Know	4.0%	2.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
8. I am comfortable with advertisers using my browsing history to serve me relevant ads, as long as that information cannot be tied to my name or any other personal information.		
Strongly Agree	6.6%	5.7%
Agree Somewhat	21.7%	17.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20.2%	15.2%
Disagree Somewhat	21.3%	17.8%
Strongly Disagree	29.3%	39.4%
Don't Know	0.8%	4.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%



SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED

9. I consider myself knowledgeable about the security risks and threats to my privacy that exist online.		
	2009	2008
Strongly Agree	21.9%	25.8%
Agree Somewhat	47.8%	48.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18.4%	13.3%
Disagree Somewhat	9.9%	9.5%
Strongly Disagree	1.3%	2.5%
Don't Know	0.7%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
10. I am aware of the tools that exist online to help me protect my privacy online.		
Strongly Agree	23.7%	30.4%
Agree Somewhat	48.8%	43.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	16.1%	14.2%
Disagree Somewhat	8.1%	7.8%
Strongly Disagree	1.6%	2.2%
Don't Know	1.7%	1.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
11. I take the necessary steps to protect my privacy online.		
Strongly Agree	33.8%	60.5%
Agree Somewhat	46.2%	30.5%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15.2%	7.4%
Disagree Somewhat	3.2%	0.7%
Strongly Disagree	0.3%	0.5%
Don't Know	1.4%	0.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
12. What percentage of ads that you see while browsing online are relevant to your wants and needs?		
0-10%	57.9%	58.3%
11-25%	26.0%	29.2%
26-50%	11.2%	8.8%
51-75%	3.6%	2.4%
76-90%	0.8%	0.9%
91-100%	0.4%	0.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%



SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED

13. Are you familiar with the term “behavioral targeting”?		
	2009	2008
Yes	42.9%	39.6%
No	46.3%	51.4%
Don't know	10.8%	9.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%
14. Please indicate how often you delete cookies stored on your computer		
Every Day	16.8%	14.3%
2 to 3 times a week	12.7%	13.8%
At least once a week	18.2%	13.8%
2 to 3 times a month	14.5%	12.5%
Once a month or less often	27.4%	30.7%
Never	10.6%	14.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

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