

First-party data is back in vogue - here's why

 By [Josephine Buys](#)

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[I wrote](#) in 2016: "First-party data is information collected by digital publishers about their visitors' behaviour which often includes Customer Relationship Management (CRM) information, subscription or survey responses, as well as social media data. This type of owned data is often seen as more valuable as it typically has higher degrees of accuracy."



Josephine Buys | image supplied

Now for a quick recap: First-party data is personal information that a media content provider (publisher), brand or company directly collects from its audience via its own channels and sources. These sources can include mobile apps, websites, social media, SMS, email and the like. This rich data provides insights through analytics and behavioural interpretation.

Collectors of first-party data know where the data comes from, how it is collected, how accurate it is and if the providers of the data consent to the collection and storage thereof.

Second-party data is the first-party data of another company, packaged and sold. I believe time is running out for this type of data market, given the current privacy concerns around Personal Identifiable Information (PII).

Lastly, third party data is collected and aggregated from multiple sources through methods such as third party browser cookies and (sometimes unethical) online tracking techniques. This type of data is often sold by a company that did not collect the data itself, usually via a data exchange platform, which is a unique marketplace specifically for this type of data.

The practice of using and monetising third party personal data has been in the spotlight, and these days can elicit significant privacy protection and regulatory compliance issues.

As we know, the term big data refers to extracting meaning from the analysis of huge amounts of complex data sets. Conversely, small data is simple enough to be used for human understanding in a volume and format that makes it accessible, informative and actionable.

Marketers are increasingly forced to stop relying on big data type third-party tracking and cookies to track customer behaviour online. Specifically, third-party data trackers such as browser cookies are increasingly being phased out.

This means advertising sales companies such as publishers, who continue to focus on the collection of permissible first-party small data will not be detrimentally affected by the demise of third-party data collection and use, because they own significantly more valuable data sets, provided voluntarily and willingly by their audiences.

It's obviously more advantageous for businesses to collect and own first-party data about hundreds of real audience members rather than to buy or collect anonymised data about thousands of consumers.



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Forward-thinking publishers and brands have been implementing first-party data strategies since long before the casualties of Covid lockdown, developing solid audience data assets through multi-platform solutions. A multitude of collection methods such as asking discovery questions when onboarding opt-in audiences, preference centres for digital assets and user-friendly micro experiences such as short quizzes, pop-ups and even email, are clearly less invasive and more effective because the data is knowingly shared by choice.

Data privacy concerns are at an all-time high. Consumers are wising up and voicing concerns about how their data is collected, stored and used. Given the sheer amount of personal data leaks we've seen in recent years and enforcement becoming ever more strict on governing regulations, first-party data is accurate, relevant in real-time and also privacy compliant.

Consumers are also becoming more privacy-centric by the day. While the dominant Google-owned Chrome browser has delayed its timetable for phasing out cookies until 2023, several other browsers such as Apple's Safari have already implemented intelligent tracking prevention and enhanced privacy features in readiness for increased government legislation.

With a rise in the use of valuable, voluntarily provided first-party data, a post-cookie world now seems less daunting for advertisers, brands and companies. With the integration of multiple data points to add richer insights and build a more accurate picture of the consumer, segmenting target audiences and tailoring content recommendations, an enhanced private browsing experience may be the true result.

Josephine Buys is CEO of The Publisher Research Council (PRC).
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