

Regulators and bigtech tame the digital Wild West

 By [Grant Lapping](#)

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Over the past five years, governments, regulators and bigtech companies have brought greater levels of control and regulation to the virtual Wild West of digital marketing. During 2022, brands and digital agencies will grapple with what this means for how they run digital campaigns, with a particular eye on what data privacy and regulation will mean for them.



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Across the world, we are seeing regulators focus on keeping up with the latest digital developments, with a view towards safeguarding consumer rights. With a growing focus on data privacy and ethics, we should not be surprised if laws and regulations such as Europe's Global Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) are just the beginning.

In addition, bigtech companies like Apple and Alphabet are taking firmer control over their platforms, taking note of the growing regulatory heat as well as the opportunity to capture and monetise consumer data within their walled gardens.

These trends mark a sea change for brands and agencies that have, for years, relying on third-party cookies and mobile identifiers to deliver personalised ads and to track engagement with their audiences.

Signs of a maturing landscape

Regulation and control over the market by a few large players are signs that the digital landscape is maturing. They are not necessarily roadblocks to running successful digital campaigns; indeed, they offer the opportunity for forward-thinking brands to engage with consumers using first-party data and to build deeper trust among their customers. When done with care for and consent from the customer, this is a chance to offer a more personalised experience to each customer.

Digital agencies, meanwhile, will need to become more technically driven to meet brands' needs in this changing market. The reason for this is that they will need to be able to help companies leverage their first-party data (for example, from CRM systems) to deliver personalised engagements to customers as they move through the sales funnel from awareness to conversion to loyal, repeat customers.

This demands that they have the technical skills to use application programming interfaces (APIs) and data hubs to integrate brands' systems with marketing platforms like Google and Facebook, in order to feed them with first-party data. In turn, this enables them to integrate first-party data with the platform's data and targeting algorithms to unlock new targeting and optimisation possibilities.

First-party data — a unique edge

The value of first-party data lies in the fact that it's unique to each brand — those that consumers trust with personal data can get a real edge over the competition. As valuable as the third-party data and the algorithms of the programmatic platforms are, they are available to everyone. Combining them with first-party data is the way that a brand can differentiate its experience and campaigns.

For brands, the focus should thus not only be on compliance with data privacy and protection regulations, but demonstrating data ethics and care for customers that make people comfortable to share their data and allow it to be used for personalised engagement. Automation of data movement can help brands with secure and compliant integration of first-party data on third-party platforms.

Agencies, meanwhile, need to have strong capabilities in data management and platform integration. It is no longer enough to understand the programmatic platforms, their tools and their algorithms — agencies also need to be able to link these systems to complex enterprise applications like Salesforce and SAP. If they get this right, they can help brands achieve better customer engagements, lower customer acquisition costs and more conversions.

The days of digital platform owners and brands operating without consequence are ending—but with digital rapidly becoming the biggest channel for marketing and media, the increased regulatory scrutiny should be no surprise. Rather than being a threat for customer-focused brands that already follow good practices, this is not a threat. It is an opportunity to win customer confidence, gather valuable data and differentiate themselves through responsible use of that data to offer better customer engagements.

ABOUT GRANT LAPPING

Lapping joined the +OneX team in May 2021 after the company he founded in 2012, DataCore Media, was acquired by +OneX, a new-age solutions and systems integrator. He manages the digital media and marketing team within +OneX. Grant has worked in digital media and strategy since 2005, and has a holistic perspective on the market due to the roles he has held across the agency, client and publisher spectrum.

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