

How can GDPR help you monetise your data better?

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We live in the Age of Disruption, so it never ceases to amaze me when marketers, of all people, have a knee-jerk reaction to any new legislation.

Rule number 1 of marketing: look for an opportunity in every problem.

Yes, preparing for the implementation of the EU's General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is going to cause some pain. But, if you take the trouble to think it through, you'll see GDPR is actually a fantastic opportunity.

Yes, I do firmly believe this.

Whatever side of the Great Brexit debate you stand, Brussels has got it spot-on with GDPR. And the UK government agrees to the extent that it has confirmed that GDPR will be part of UK law regardless of the Brexit outcome.

And we can sum up the big benefit in one word.

Trust.

But, before we go more deeply into that, let's quickly review the background of GDPR.

Why is GDPR being introduced?

There's been a lot of written about the thinking behind the introduction of GDPR. With so many saying that 'data is the new oil', comprehensive data protection regulation is inevitable and, frankly, welcome. In a nutshell, when GDPR comes into force on 25th May, 2018, it will harmonise existing legislation to create an EU-wide framework which better protects the privacy of consumers.

This is very important for digital marketers because the law clearly states that it doesn't matter what remote, cheap, outsourced part of the world your company is located, if you want to operate in the EU you have to abide by the EU's rules.

What does GDPR change?

The main focus of GDPR is on the conditions for consent (from users to companies to use their data). Consent now needs to meet higher standards, and has to be given 'unambiguously' with 'opt-in' action. Clearly a challenge for organisations that have no direct relationship with the users, but still use data to function (e.g., for advertising tracking).

GDPR also introduces several organisational changes, such the introduction of data protection officer, and increased sanctions.

The best way to get into the details is to read the IAB UK compendium here:

<https://www.iabuk.net/news/quick-qa-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr>

The backdrop – a ‘secret underworld’ of data brokers

There’s that famous quote by Joseph Heller, “Just because you’re paranoid, it doesn’t mean they aren’t after you.”

When users sit down at their computers, they have this nagging feeling that there’s a band of data brokers sitting on their shoulders.

And they’re right.

Data is truly the ‘New Oil’ and obtaining a consumer’s digital footprint is the holy grail of marketing.

Google and Facebook have greatly increased their fortunes thanks to the reach of their third-party tracking of consumers.

By aggregating, connecting and analysing the online behaviour of billions of people they have created a very valuable commodity which they can sell to businesses and governments.

The problem with this comes when there is an absence of transparency and real consent. Most consumers are often not aware of what they are signing up for when they use websites. They are faced with long and difficult to understand terms and conditions that do not spell out the possible consequences they are agreeing to.

Of course, if companies like Google and Facebook used more direct layman’s language they would do untold damage to their business. After all, how many people would agree to something that said,

“We’re going to track you 24/7, everywhere you go. We’re going to record every purchase, every website you visit. We’ll know (or guess) when you have a medical condition you want to hide, when you have a lover, when you are secretly looking for a new job. We have deleted the word ‘secret’ from the dictionary. And when we gather all this information, we’ll sell it to other people to do what they want with it. Hopefully, they will use all your personal data in a responsible way. If they don’t, well, that’s your bad luck.”

Then there is the exponential rise in retargeting. When done badly or too aggressively, it really spooks people. Again, explained in plain language, retargeting is scary and the first victim is consumer trust.

“If you visit our site, we’ll stalk you everywhere you go on the internet until you give in. And, if our system isn’t set up properly, we’ll keep stalking you even then.”

The problem with all this is twofold:

1. The erosion of trust. As end-users face a growing incidence of fraud within an “impersonal” system where there is little or no accountability, even honest brands and advertisers get tarred with the same brush as the cowboys.
2. The concentration of power within the Google/Facebook Duopoly. The Big Two are capturing an ever-growing slice of the pie and, far from using this market dominance responsibly, they are becoming repositories of fake news and spin doctors. If you doubt this, the next time you see the headline “You won’t believe what happened next...” click through and see whether the story is worth even a second of your time. This avalanche of click bait and fake news squeezes out traditional publishers who are then deprived of resources and the ability to deliver engaging and trustworthy content. This vicious circle serves only to further reduce consumers’ trust.

The Opportunity:

With the advent of the GDPR, digital marketing organisations so far side-lined by the Duopoly have the opportunity to regain a central role, and monetise their user relationships and user data better.

The opportunity to

- Re-establish user-publisher and user-brand relationships
- Renew user trust in digital advertising by companies that embrace the spirit of GDPR
- Renew trust in brands and punish frauds by starving them of engagement
- Foster a better distribution of the value created, to benefit original content creators, and their relationships with users

Asking consumers for consent in collecting and treating their data gives publishers the opportunity to establish direct relationships – converting so much traffic into registered users. Not just to replace the previous cookies, but also and especially to offer personalisation, advertising that matters, and an overall higher-value service. Research shows that consumers are increasingly willing to share their data in exchange for clear benefits. [See <https://digiday.com/media/european-consumers-attitudes-toward-data-privacy-5-charts/>].

Direct and trusted user-publisher relationships are the best way to solve another issue in the current system of secret underworld: too many impressions, too many clicks are fraudulent. Advertisers pay for a system that all too often places their communication in front of eyes of robots. A publisher that knows their users can ensure their communication is seen by real people.

More trust from advertisers, and less reliance on third-party trackers and fraud-prevention mechanisms, in turn can give back importance to direct relationships between advertisers and

publishers as well – with the opportunity of reducing the slice of value captured by intermediaries. A recent report by Campaignlive [See <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/publishers-face-problems-tech-taxes-control/1447265>] highlighted how much agencies were clipping from their clients – in some cases, up to 70%. When you combine these so-called “tech taxes” to the Google/Facebook squeeze it shows how broken the current system is.

In a nutshell, GDPR, by placing data control back in the hands of users, can give new strength to publishers – our very source of critical news and original content – and away from the duopoly, with renewed trust across the entire ecosystem.

Future publisher revenues will be totally tied to building a proprietary database of customers who you are engaged with directly, on a personal basis.

As I stated at the beginning, I believe this engagement will come through developing trust.

How to miss the opportunity: the compliance-only approach

Unfortunately, organisations can easily miss this opportunity by only paying lip service to the legislation and not embracing the spirit of GDPR.

Adapting to comply with GDPR will require some pain and effort, but can be done with a “strictly-necessary” mindset. Companies can identify a data protection officer, ask for opt-in consent from users, and ensure that they follow the letter of the law.

The industry can miss it too. The ‘secret underworld’ of companies tracking us and placing cookies in our browsers could continue operating as they do today, after finding out how to obtain consumer consent. It’s not too hard to imagine long opt-in forms that users will skim through and consent to – even annoyed by an additional piece of bureaucracy originally intended to protect them.

Who will benefit from the compliance-only approach? The duopoly in the first place, which still retains much of the control that powers the existing status quo.

However, I firmly believe that publishers can tilt the current equilibrium and acquire a new, central role in the digital marketing ecosystem – getting a bigger share of the pie, and more resources to invest in better original content, such as news and critical information.

The Expressly proposal: bring advertising back into the light

Back in 2013, when GDPR was just a glint in Brussels’ eye, Expressly was working on a future-proofed solution to the whole issue of privacy and building trust. We took the principles of transparency, consent and reciprocity and looked at how we could change digital advertising.

We developed a powerful technology that enables digital publishers to transform anonymous visitors into registered users, and in turn target them with high-converting advertising campaigns. In essence, Expressly provides publishers with technology to transform any link (e.g., banners, emails,

SMS/WhatsApp, native articles), into a 'Powerlink' that transparently asks the person if they want to visit the advertiser's site, with just one click immediately creating a full profile using their same existing data from the publisher. This gives back users over 95% of the time they waste typing out their personal info again and again, in turn leading to unprecedented conversion of clicks into registered users – typically in the range of 60% to 80%.

It's time to start building direct, human relationships online, and make them the centre of digital advertising: more power and value to content creators, more control and trust for users, more relevance and trust for brands.

To find out more about how Expressly can help publishers regain a central role in digital marketing, [get in touch](#)

Useful Links:

UK ICO tips: <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1624219/preparing-for-the-gdpr-12-steps.pdf>

European Union GDPR site: <http://www.eugdpr.org/>