

When Digital Marketing and Privacy Meet, Something Must Give



Everyone who shopped on Amazon last year (over 200 million) knows that the giant online retailer is good at making purchase suggestions. Indeed, they track every move and serve up what they think you are going to buy based on your online behavior. Other digital marketers strive to be that good. At some point the question becomes how will digital marketing and privacy be reconciled?

Digital Marketing Runs on Data

Modern digital marketing runs on data. Tons of it—so much that they call it a [data explosion](#). Online eCommerce sites gather data on shoppers' online behavior, their location, demographics, preferences, and everything imaginable that they think will give them an edge in pitching the right products to customers.

And it's not just online retailers that gather the data. Modern financial institutions use sophisticated technology adapted by former government intelligence gathering experts to evaluate how much of a risk you are if they grant you a loan. One marketing technology provider calls it Digital Foresight.

How much data is too much?

Whether online marketers can [process, store, and protect](#) all the data they gather is one question. Does all that data impact my life in ways that I would not choose is quite another. Consider these real-life examples of digital marketing surprises, head scratchers, and concerns:

- **Amazon knew we were pregnant before we did.** Somehow, Amazon’s data algorithms deduced from a shopper’s online browsing that they were pregnant and began suggesting pregnancy and baby products.
- **I just said X and look at this ad that popped up on my phone.** After hearing that repeatedly from his wife, at least one consumer is convinced that Siri is listening all the time and acting on what it hears.



- **I’m worried about searching for this medicine.** Does submitting a Google search for a medicine related to a specific type of cancer disclose to digital marketers (and who knows else) that I have a terminal disease? How will that affect my life and my job?
- **Do I really want to send my DNA to people I don’t know?** Many people are matched up with people from all over the world via an ancestry quest DNA sample. What happens if that DNA data is hacked? Could I be linked to a crime I didn’t commit?

Where Privacy is Headed

We reported recently on the outlook for [state and federal privacy regulations](#). Will we see more privacy laws? Almost certainly. Already we’ve seen laws proposed that restrict the use of genetic information, data pertaining to minors, and the collection and use of data by telecom companies and Internet service providers (ISPs). The tip of the iceberg really.

At the same time, consumers are becoming more wary due to experiences like those cited above and numerous data breaches. Marketers who employ a trust-focused approach to data privacy seek to counter that sentiment.

Many support a federal privacy framework to bring order and predictability to the evolving patchwork of state data privacy laws.

Hopefully, that increases [consumer trust](#) and confidence that their privacy is protected and data used responsibly.

Finally, many in our society are concerned about how cancel culture might affect their lives. Does buying a gun risk your job? Does buying merchandise that supports a particular cause or candidate blacklist you as a performer? These are valid questions related to privacy.



Between digital marketing and privacy, what will give?

Amazon wants to know everything about you. Yet, in our hyper-critical society, people are feeling more guarded about sharing personal information, even shopping history. Working out what data can be collected and how it can be used is sure to be a battle.

That battle may continue for some time. Perhaps the solution lies in granting the consumer data transparency and individual control over those decisions. Such a move could ease the pressure from both sides. If no solution is found, digital marketers stand to lose a lot of one of their most valuable assets, consumer trust.

Data Privacy and Digital Marketing Experts

To navigate the choppy waters between digital marketing and privacy, count on the [retail technology](#), [digital marketing](#) and [information governance](#) experts at eMazzanti Technologies. They help with data infrastructure, data storage, cyber security, and compliance to keep your business growing and in step with best practice and privacy law.

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