

## Who's Afraid of Behavioral Targeting?



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[Behavioral targeting](#) is still a much misunderstood term in online advertising, even after having been in the lexicon for several years. The confusion isn't limited to advertisers and clients either. It exists among ad agencies, publishers, consumers, and the media community as a whole.

Recently, I was interviewed by a reporter for one of the top five national newspapers about Google's [DoubleClick acquisition](#) and the implications on consumer privacy. The reporter thought that since I write about behavioral targeting, I'd be a good candidate to discuss privacy infringements.

Early in the interview it became apparent that behavioral targeting 101 was necessary. The reporter was convinced that personally identifiable information (PII) was used in behavioral targeting. Even after I explained that it wasn't and how behavioral targeting worked, she asked me how we accessed consumers' e-mail addresses. This conversation confirmed that long-held beliefs are hard to change.

In an effort to educate automotive advertisers about behavioral targeting, [Jumpstart Automotive Media](#) created a site called [WhatisBT.com](#). The site covers everything an auto advertiser needs to know to embrace behavioral targeting, including case studies, a buying guide, and keys to success.

The site was a smart move because auto advertisers constitute one of the largest online spenders and behavioral targeting can be a very effective way for them to reach consumers. It would be nice to have more of these 101 sites set up for other categories and strategies (are you listening, [IAB?](#)).

Obviously, education is necessary if behavioral targeting is to progress to the next level. However, before we decide how we're going to make a strong educational push, we should first tackle the reasons behavioral targeting is so misunderstood and misrepresented. As in medicine, we need to get to the root of the problem.

Let's start with the fundamental question: who's afraid of behavioral targeting?

### Consumers

According to Jay Walker-Smith, president of marketing firm [Yankelovich](#), the average consumer sees 5,000 ads a day. The assumed media strategy is to blanket ad messages with the hopes that the right consumer will come across it. For those of us in the digital space, advanced targeting methods like behavioral targeting offer a much more precise mechanism to reach prospects. Consequently, this means consumers receiving ads with specific messages tailored to their needs. So, what's the problem?

Consumers are scared about the wrong people knowing too much about them and using this data without their consent. Even in an age where many of us promote our lives through blogs and community sites, we're still in control of that experience. The key to gaining consumer confidence with behavioral targeting is to demonstrate to consumers that they are in control. Control is more important than even relevance.

### Advertisers

The consumer paranoia with behavioral targeting has affected advertisers for the simple reason that advertisers are also consumers. And some descriptions of behavioral targeting can sound like a manifestation of George Orwell's "1984."

As a result, some concerns are triggered: It will cause more harm than benefit. It won't work. Unless you're an advertiser who takes risks and accepts the consequences, embarking on any project where the response may be adverse seems illogical.

I'm not saying behavioral targeting will create adverse affects, but the fear that it may is very real. Lack of case studies, accountability, and standards all compound this fear. Behavioral targeting has been around long enough that advertisers expect to see concrete case studies and best practices.

## **Publishers**

Publishers have to appease consumers and advertisers, two very vocal and scary groups, especially when they aren't happy. For behavioral targeting, this means creating a product that respects the consumer experience and allows advertisers to communicate better with consumers.

Since publishers don't usually control creative or budget, accountability can be tricky. If the creative used for behavioral targeting is weak, should publishers turn the campaign away? Should they offer to build the creative? Do they even know if it will perform well?

Despite fears of losing revenue, publishers must put integrity and accountability at the forefront of their decisions. By doing so, the big bad monsters won't seem so big after all.

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An advocate for creative media thinking, Anna has been a part of several industry firsts, including the first fully integrated campaign and podcast for Volvo. Before joining Euro RSCG six years ago, Anna was a media negotiator for TBS Media Management, where she bought media for such clients as CVS and RadioShack. Anna earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from St. John's University in New York.