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An Executive's Guide for

Contending with the Post-Cookie Apocalypse

Making data-driven decisions and reaching customers with marketing when the data dries up

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Marketers' hands will soon be reaching into digital cookie jars and coming up empty. As third-party data drives an overwhelming number of marketing and customer engagement strategies, it's imperative to address this change head on or be left with nothing but digital crumbs.

By the end of 2023, **Google Chrome will eliminate third-party cookies** as part of their privacy sandbox initiative. The move follows the lead of Firefox's and Apple's browsers, both of which already stopped letting their users be tracked digitally - and this doesn't even account for ad blockers! It's a consumer-friendly move that gives users greater privacy, transparency, choice, and control over how their data is used. But for marketers, this tiny snippet of data enables critical functions like recording user preferences, retargeting ads, tracking and attributing leads, and more.

Make no mistake: this is one of the biggest changes we've faced in marketing (and sales), and it's a game changer for digital activities. But by getting ahead of the change, marketers can continue to have meaningful online conversations with users and even deepen relationships with key buyers, using more sophisticated tools.

Click to jump to a section: **What Does 'No Cookies' Really Mean? | What's Going Away and Why it Really Matters | Where to Invest Now | Build for the Long Term Next Steps for the Cookie-less World**

What Does "No Cookies" *Really* Mean?

If you're used to your teams talking about analytics, tracking, pixeling, remarketing codes, auto-filling forms, or, of course, cookies, then you're hearing about this problem because the tried-and-true methods for these functions are going away.

Browsers are actively eliminating third-party data and cookies. With it, we'll lose the insights and the ability to understand the online behavior that brings prospects to our doors and the steps they take to become customers. Marketers rely on these insights, and they are still available.

Instead of cookies, insights need to rely more heavily on first-party data. This is trickier because first-party data is only available after a higher level of interaction and trust, wherein a prospect supplies their contact details and asks for information.

FIRST-PARTY VS. THIRD-PARTY DATA

Examples of first-party data, which remain	Examples of third-party data, which go away
Data customers give you	Data gleaned from cookies, tracked by pixels
Behavior tracked by UTMs	Enriched demographic information around location, income or interest
Providing details on a webform	Details about how and where new prospects are learning about your company
Information in a CRM or database	Paid services to detail information that builds audiences who will be the most receptive
Subscription to a content stream	Data that fuels reporting and analytics for data-based campaigns
Email provided in chat	Data that informs attribution of leads by showing all touches, not just the last one

Losing cookies mean we no longer have the ability to facilitate a number of digital marketing functions in the manner we've become accustomed to:

- Retargeting ads and continuing the content conversation when someone who previously interacted comes back. Without third-party data, we risk restarting the conversation from the starting point every time a prospect engages with us. This will result in a stagnant customer journey that goes nowhere.

- Keeping an item in an ecommerce shopping cart from a previous visit and retargeting to remind an anonymous user to provide information and complete a purchase.

- Smart forms that auto-populate with information collected from elsewhere.

- Understanding trends and gaining insights around top-of-funnel prospects who haven't yet engaged deeply enough to be known to our marketing efforts.

- Accessing demographic data such as age, location, or web history to better target web-based ads. We'll still have this option in places like Google Ads, but reliance on them could become trickier as the data becomes more suspect over time.

What's Going Away, and Why it *Really* Matters

It's more work to have the same kind of customer experience and initiatives, using first-party data. First and foremost, we need prospects to opt into our conversations, and we lose some runway to nurture the trust and engagement necessary for a prospect to give us the information and consent to enter our funnels and journeys.

Once this happens, we need to change the systems we rely on to track prospects. Pixels and third-party data made it much easier—almost effortless—to track web activities. Without third-party data, we lose the ability to understand our audience, and we need to rebuild that capability from scratch.

Demographics and where people are converting on a website is something that needs to be understood, using more manual and complicated processes. Until now, we've had a number of sophisticated ways to get granular on user behavior, and we are losing those insights.

This has especially huge implications for remarketing. Currently, we can pick up conversations where we left off. Without third-party data, we could be starting over every time.

The initial acquisition of prospects is also in peril. Third-party data provides a lot of information about how prospects are coming to us which drives an understanding of how to find more prospects like them. Knowing where to contextually place ads for net new leads is going to be much more difficult.

Invest Now: Big Plays with Immediate Payoff

Knowing where to start with this issue is tricky, so here are four areas to jump on immediately before third-party data is gone for good:

One: Audit first-party data to create an inventory

It's likely that expertise about your first-party versus third-party data usage lies within the purview of a few individuals who have the specific details. However, usage of that data drives strategies far more widely across sales and marketing, so step one becomes an inventory and audit of what you're collecting and how you're currently using it.

Here's a quick start guide on how to do this and a graphic below for a template to get you started.

1. Identify tools that use data, either first party or third party (overlap between the two is expected). We jump start the list with common ones below but also consider any MarTech tools, especially those integrated with CRM or social media. Another place to look for third- party data users is any process that involves collecting data, like a web form.

2. In the second column, capture teams and team members that manage tools. For a typical organization, we expect to see a different name or team in each box. This becomes the list of people who need to cooperate on driving change.

3. In the third column, list others who rely on data for the tool. For example, often the owner of a CRM exists somewhere in the IT department; but the power users of data from a CRM are more likely to be grouped in sales and marketing.

4. In the last column, capture how data is being used. Some of the questions to answer here:

   • What types of interaction history and forms are we tracking?

   • What kind of KPI information are we tracking, like time spent on webpages?

   • Do we understand where conversions and interactions are happening on our site?

DATA AUDIT AND INVENTORY

TOOL	STEWARD	OTHER USERS	USE CASES FOR DATA
CRM			
Google Analytics			
Website Analytics			

Two: Map out customer experiences on your website

Personas, customer experience and buyers' journeys … it's the gnarly knot of processes that marketers perennially struggle to get their arms around. We've **talked a lot about customer journeys**—it's a topic that sounds so simple. But one of the most sophisticated and comprehensive processes out there addresses how we understand who our customers are and what they want.

And now is the time to get that process right,

Step 1: Revisit personas or ideal customer profiles.

Step 2: Check in on persona performance. You should have a map of what prospects are coming to your website for, where they are coming from, and where they go once they land in your digital backyard. Third-party data provides much more visibility on the efficacy of these processes, so it is worth investing the time now and taking advantage of insights that will soon evaporate.

Step 3: Focus on the remarketing stages. We know data in this critical area is going to dry up, so rather than risk getting overwhelmed by the entire customer experience process, focus on efforts to recapture attention and continue conversations. Focus on the efficacy of content and also the strategies that work to get attention, engage, tailor experiences and especially personalize them on your website.

Three: Focus on the ability to collect first-party data

UTMs will be the new way to pixel. Many companies are still elementary in their use of tools that will replace cookies. Now is the time to make the switch and develop the expertise to use the tools that are quickly becoming the new normal. Teams that aren't currently using these tools will need to adapt processes around the new ones, and that will take a significant shift.

Adding these new elements will hobble the efforts of several teams as they struggle with both the basics, as well as a more sophisticated new normal.

Four: Stop over-segmenting your marketing and harmonize your KPIs

Marketing efforts are frequently disjointed across teams, something that might surface if you complete the Data Audit and Inventory suggested above. The result is that multiple people chase the same goals but do so in a way that is siloed. This has worked up to this point because we've been able to use third-party data to glue these activities together and provide a cohesive look at these disparate efforts. However, this will be problematic moving ahead.

Here's an example: Companies frequently deploy their specialists with individual goals, which means separating organic, paid, and email tactics. Different teams run with these efforts, and communication about what's going on is often superficial or even reactive. Third-party data has been like a giant light switch. When we turn it on, we suddenly see how we are talking to prospects across different channels. These capabilities are going away, and it's as if we are suddenly stuck in the dark.

We'll lose the story of what happens between first and last touch with a narrow lens of focus. We need to be working toward one goal. That means building out reporting capabilities to tell a story about our brand or product before the ability to leverage third-party data goes away for good.

Build For The Long Term, Prepare For The Present

If there's a silver lining in all of this, it's that first-party data has always been the more robust and reliable way to speak with prospects and clients. Best practices, like ideal customer profiles and high-quality content that speaks directly to their wants and needs, is the best way to grow your business whether you're tracking with pixels, UTMs, or even whatever comes next. How can you stay ahead of the game… permanently? Read on.

It's All About the Journey

We know it's fundamental, but it's worth focusing on because the single biggest threat to "no cookies" is that we risk replaying the same content repeatedly, never progressing our prospects past the starting point.

As marketers, we rely heavily on pixels to show us when a prospect has visited before, and on subsequent visits to show the right "next step" of content on the journey. Without cookies, return visitors don't pick up where they left off. Instead, they start over. It's like traveling in a circle that always takes you back where you started.


Obviously, this is lethal; but luckily, it's not permanent. There are two ways to fix this broken route.

Above all, marketers need to develop competency using UTMs. UTMs are attached to links and are supported by Google Analytics, which means you get solid tracking

and intel that works with the valuable analytics data you're already used to. UTMs are relatively simple as far as functionality goes, yet we've seen companies large and small waste tens of thousands of dollars through improper usage.
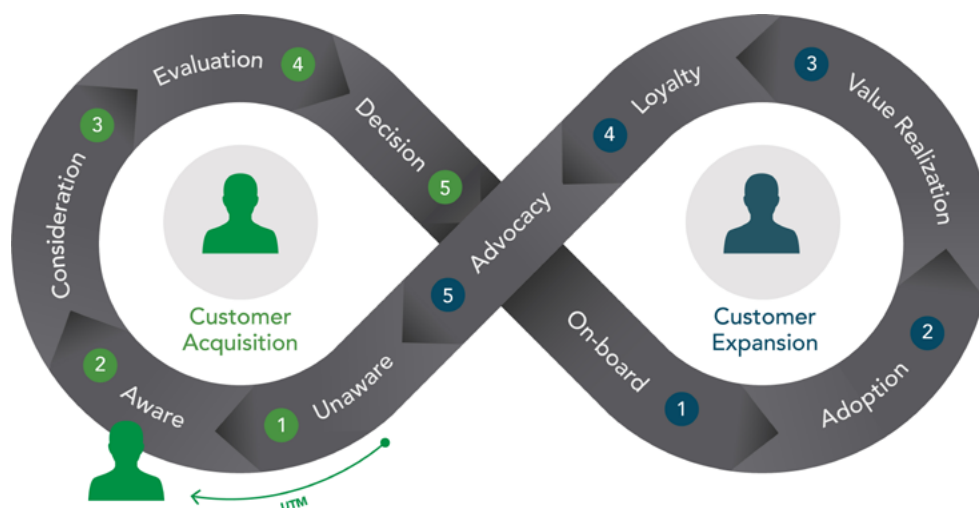
For UTMs to work, the journey itself must speak directly to the pain and needs of the prospect. A consistent message that delivers the right message at the right time and in the right place is the kind of journey that converts. So often, we find ourselves working with clients who have solid tools for serving up a customer journey, but the content falls flat. Often what prospects are seeing doesn't demonstrate enough understanding of their needs to keep moving on the journey, or it talks more about the company than the people who need the product. A well-mapped journey built on top of a multichannel strategy is what turns a prospect into a lead.
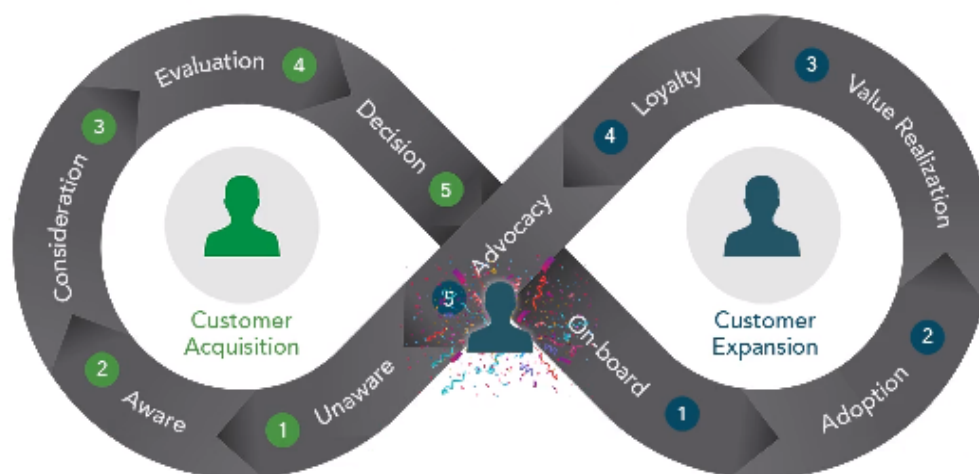
Picking up the Trail to Find and Foster Audiences

Another pain point for marketers is how to get the right customer on the right journey that speaks to their pain. It's that old "if a tree falls in the forest and no one can hear it, did it make a sound" question. Long before digital reigned supreme, marketers put soap commercials on daytime television shows and candy bars at eye level with the kids who would want them. For marketers, the name of the game has always been (and will always be) getting the product in front of the right buyer.

In the world of digital marketing, connecting audiences with journeys and mapping the most effective channels is another process made easier by cookies. We think of the starting point as a digital watering hole: putting the satiating message where the thirst is the greatest.

Cookies made it a little easier to see how prospects landed on our doorstep, but that's a reactive process. We'll see a shift to make the creation of watering holes a proactive process. Across channels, we'll need to work smarter when it comes to targeting.

Over the long term, there are also tools that will become more important, and savvy marketers are investing in them now.

- Intent data. We've been blown away by the sophistication of the tools that already rely heavily on first-party data to collect—and crunch—information about online behavior that shows high interest or high need in a specific area. Companies like 6Sense can overlay onto channels, like Linked In, and show us as marketers where our watering holes are, and who is taking a sip.

- Audience insight tools. Once you've got the first-party data and information from UTMs streaming in, how do you make sense of it? Tools like **Drift Audiences** sit on top of this information and mine it for insights. It's not so much about creating a new audience as it is about finding the value and places to invest in the people you're already tracking.

Email is Making a Comeback

Email is going to surge back because people have already identified themselves, and you've got an invite to meet a prospect on their terms. We've been so focused on inbound, but this outbound component has some serious upsides:

- Anyone who takes the time to give you their email is more likely to show interest in your message.

- You're in control, and with email, you've got the floor to make your case without competition from other content on the channel.

- Everything in email is trackable. Create a compelling CTA, add a UTM, and watch the analytics roll in on how your message is being received.

A caution about email: more email means more static to cut through. Compelling, well-targeted, and engaging content will win over this outbound tool. Personalization and highly bespoke content will be of the highest value when it comes to making it to the top of an inbox. Ten highly-focused emails that get the right message to the right prospect at the right time will be far more valuable than a blast to hundreds or thousands.

Content. It's Still King because it will Always be King

The ability to tell your story is always going to be a differentiator; but through the lens of the cookie-less world, content is important because Google rewards loyalty. Click it, stay on it, and share it: there's simply no substitute for content that solves pain and engages. So be merciless. Customers need to see answers that solve a problem and learn something new.

Whoever is telling the best story and driving engagement has an advantage in the cookie-less world.

Video and Media Marketing Poised for Growth

What are your top three videos right now? Most of us can't answer that! But video is an immensely useful tool, especially when served up by YouTube. YouTube? Yes. It's a Google property using first-party data, so analytics will reward engagement. Moreover, you can build audiences and net new contacts from video viewership and leverage analytics to see what messages are resonating. YouTube isn't just about video; in fact, **it's the third largest search platform behind Google and Google Images.**

In addition, you can increase on-site engagement with the right video embedded into related website content. Give your reader more reasons to stay when they visit.

Video is an Achilles heel for so many of the clients we work with. Much like email, it gets a bad rep, not so much because it's a bad tool but because it's frequently not used well. Engaging content is a must, and when used well, it's a smart content marketing play.

Develop Lead Management and Outbound Capabilities

Cookies affect all aspects of marketing, and lead management processes certainly face some challenges.

- Lead scoring algorithms will be less effective if someone isn't cookied. You won't see a prospect score up when they've visited repeatedly and consumed a lot of content. It will be necessary to revisit lead scoring models and look at ways to compensate so the marketing pipeline doesn't suddenly begin to slow down.

- Sales and marketing need to reconsider what to do with prospects who pony up their info as part of first-party data processes. When someone has taken the time to

raise their hand, they are a valuable prospect. You must, however, be hypersensitive to sales readiness. The lack of cookies will change the definitions when you lack information about the journey that brought your customer to your door.

- Attribution has always been a challenge as well. If you can't see the journey, you fall back into the trap of giving the credit to the last touch. UTMs can fill this gap, but they have to be fully implemented to keep the attribution process moving smoothly.

The Additive Case to be Addicted to Chatbots

If you're not using automated tools to drive conversations with chatbots, you're missing out. There is much untapped ability for platforms to customize and automate an experience through a customer-focused approach. When done with intent, chatbots help people see value in engaging with a brand, in a personalized way. They are an additive to an otherwise robust user experience that's focused on the user.

The wrong reason to use bots is to automate the process of mining for data or lessen the load when it comes to conversing. The right reason is to add to the overall customer experience and connect on a more meaningful level. When this happens, we're seeing more and more people willing not to just interact but to provide that high-value first-party data.

Another good reason for chatbots is immediacy multiplied by relevance. Chatbots should vary across different areas of your website, ready to serve up unique assets or experiences that extend the value of the content the user is viewing. One tactic we love: instead of a gated web form, use the chatbot to deliver an asset right away by entering information and getting the link to the asset immediately. And follow up that first asset with a choice of four more, as well as offers of other relevant calls to continue the conversation.

Think about it: If a key contact from a target account grabs one of your assets, you can have logic in place to immediately offer them a chance to connect with Sales (in addition to other options). It reduces friction on their buying journey but prevents unqualified leads from taking up Sales' valuable time

7 Key Stages For Successful Lead Management

Colby Renton

It's a holy grail of scalable approaches to personalization that leave your prospect in charge.

Chatbots also seamlessly integrate within an existing MarTech infrastructure such as intent data platforms, MAPs, and CRMs. It's a leg up for a sales rep when they're chatting with a lead they know is qualified based on the data right there in front of them.

Related: **We're a partner with Drift!**

Cut The Fluff: A No-B.S. Executive's Guide To Account-Based Marketing

Lorena Harris

The Impact on Account-Based Marketing Strategies

Account-based marketing (ABM) strategies rely heavily on the ability to identify individuals who are part of the accounts getting deferential attention. Doing this traditionally required cookies, and UTM parameters can only go so far in filling the gap. Many of us are asking: Can intent data platforms replace the role of cookies in account-based marketing? Well, sort of. No one thing can fill all the gaps, but in so many ways more data can help if you know how to use it. The best uses center around:

- Better informing advertising strategies, as well as customization and personalization.

- Seeing the overall trends in market interests.

- Enabling sales and streamline conversations at the account level.

- Collecting first-party data to hone the overall plays in the ABM strategy.

Another critical aspect in a cookie-less world is eliminating the linear path of a typical customer journey and building a radial path. Don't offer one single asset as a next step; offer many as a choice. This helps offset some of the issues with retargeting and the repetitiveness of content when you don't have first-party data but still need to maximize touchpoints.

More than Crumbs in the Cookie-less World

Much will change with the elimination of cookies; but so much stays the same. What we think will never change is the idea of customer focus. Cookies are, in the end, a tool that helps marketers but does little for prospects. When you build processes that are truly customer focused, you stick with the most powerful tools (like first-party data) that endure because, in the end, they're the right thing to do.

And as an extension of customer focus, what works no matter what is high value content that addresses pain points. This is not about how we, as a company, get the data we need to market ourselves. Do that and you'll miss the boat on speaking to what the customer really wants.

Cookies or not, it's a relentless focus on your user that wins the business.

INBOUND MARKETING CONSULTING