



E-book

# Impact of the *cookieless future* on marketing

## In this e-book

What are cookies anyway? →

How do cookies work? →

The three reasons for a cookieless future →

What impact will this cookieless future have? →

How do I prepare? →

Conclusion →

## What is about to happen?

In January 2020, Google announced its plan to stop supporting third-party cookies in Chrome sometime in 2022. Recently, they have postponed their own deadline to early 2023. "That's still a long way off" you might think, but time goes fast and many companies still have a lot of preparatory work to do.

The digital advertising landscape will change dramatically as a result of the ban on third-party cookies. It could even be such a big change that we'll still be talking about it in 10 years' time.

Safari and Firefox have already started blocking third-party cookies. We are already experiencing the impact of this, but Chrome remains the largest browser with more than 60% market share. In short, the real hit is yet to come.

[In this whitepaper, we will immerse you in the world of cookies, discuss what exactly is about to happen and how you can prepare your company for it. Enjoy!](#)



**Glenn Weuts**

Head of Marketing Technology

[glenn.weuts@iodigital.com](mailto:glenn.weuts@iodigital.com)

What are *cookies* anyway?

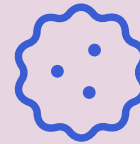
A cookie is nothing more than a small text file that is stored on the hard disk of your computer. Based on this file, a browser or a website can recognise you and personalise your browsing experience. Cookies can be created both by the company that created the website (**first-party**) and by other companies such as Google and Facebook (**third-party**).

Besides cookies, a website or company can also collect data about you in another way, namely through **logged data**. As the name suggests, this is data about visitors logged on a website. This is often the user's email address or the preferences he or she set on the website itself. **This logged data is first-party data** and will become increasingly important in the future.



### Third-party cookies

- Created and stored by **other organisations** that have nothing to do with the website
- Used for **cross-site** ad tracking, profiling and targeting
- **Not essential** to how the internet works
- E.g. cookies created by Facebook Pixel, Google Ads/Analytics tracking



### First-party cookies

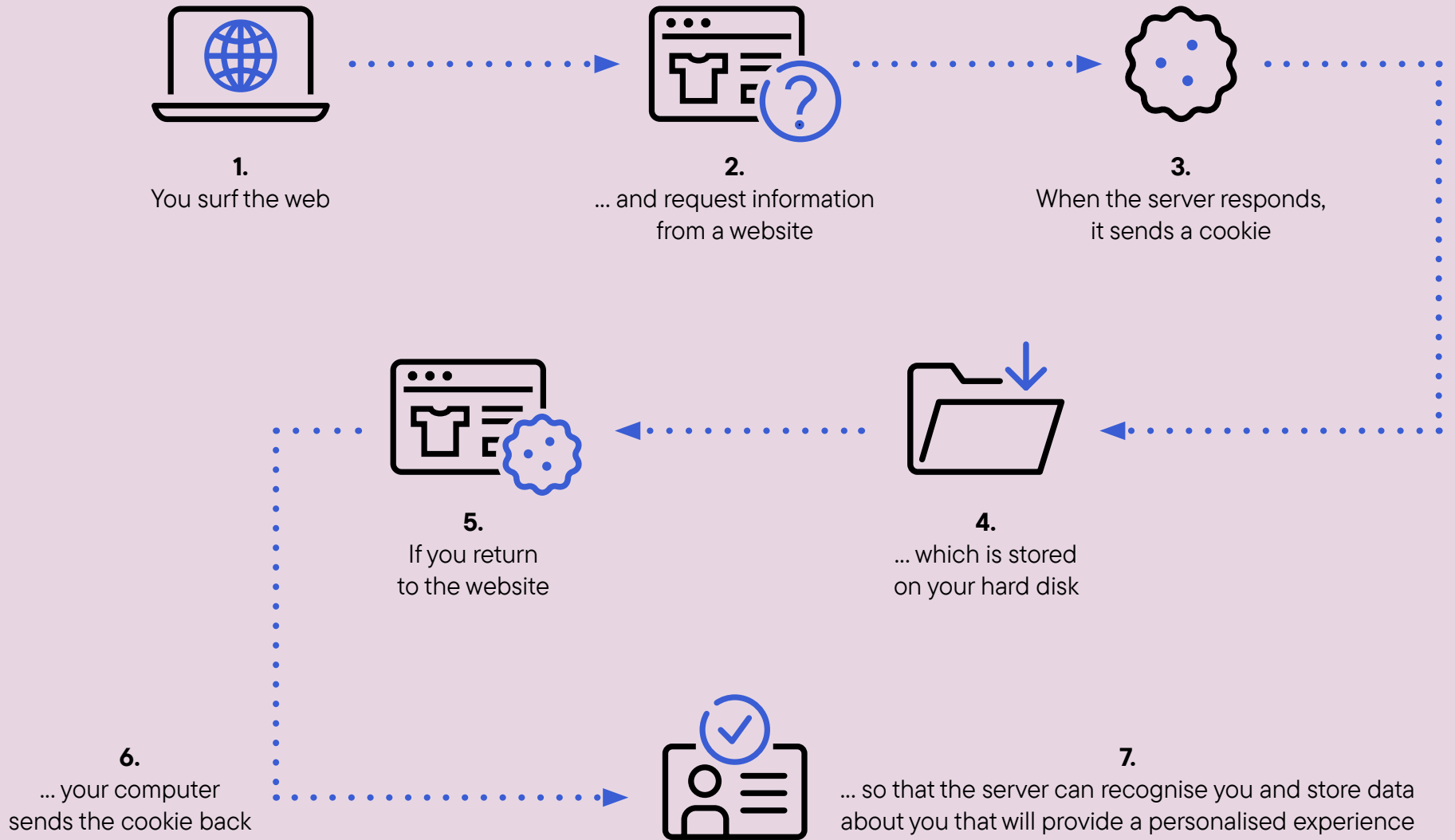
- Created and stored **by the organisation that created the website**
- Used for **on-site personalisation**, storage of preferences and login status
- **Essential** to how the internet works
- Remembers the content of your shopping cart and your language preference



### Logged data

- **Data** stored by the organisation **about logged in users**
- **PII data**
- **Consent data**
- Essential for building customer relationships
- E.g.: E-mail address, preferences, location, User ID
- External logged data can be viewed as 2nd-party data

How do cookies *work*?





Both first-and third-party cookies go through the same process. The only difference lies in step 3, **where you talk about your own server in the case of first-party cookies** and about **a server belonging to another company in the case of third-party cookies.**

The power of third-party cookies is that there is always one party that places these cookies and can therefore also read them. The most common example is the one of **Facebook Pixel**, which creates a third-party cookie and sends this information to Facebook's servers. Because so many websites have added Facebook Pixel, Facebook owns an enormous data set with information about the visitors of these websites.

If you have ever placed an advertisement on Facebook, chances are you have tapped into this dataset as several targeting options are based on it.

Apart from Facebook, there are various AdTech players that apply the same principle. This way, there are several companies with huge data potential that can resell your data. The problem we have seen for some years now is that website visitors have no idea which companies are collecting data about them, and which exact data they collect.



The *three reasons*  
for a cookieless future

1

### Consumer habits and technology adoption

Third-party cookies have been "out-of-fashion" for a while now due to the new digital touchpoints (internet of things), the fact that **cookies cannot identify people in a multi-device world** and the **shift to mobile by consumers**.

2

### Data protection and privacy regulations

GDPR and the e-Privacy Directive are some examples of how legislation is increasingly tightening control on data protection and privacy. There is **much stricter scrutiny from governments and consumers** on how companies collect, process and use their customers' data.

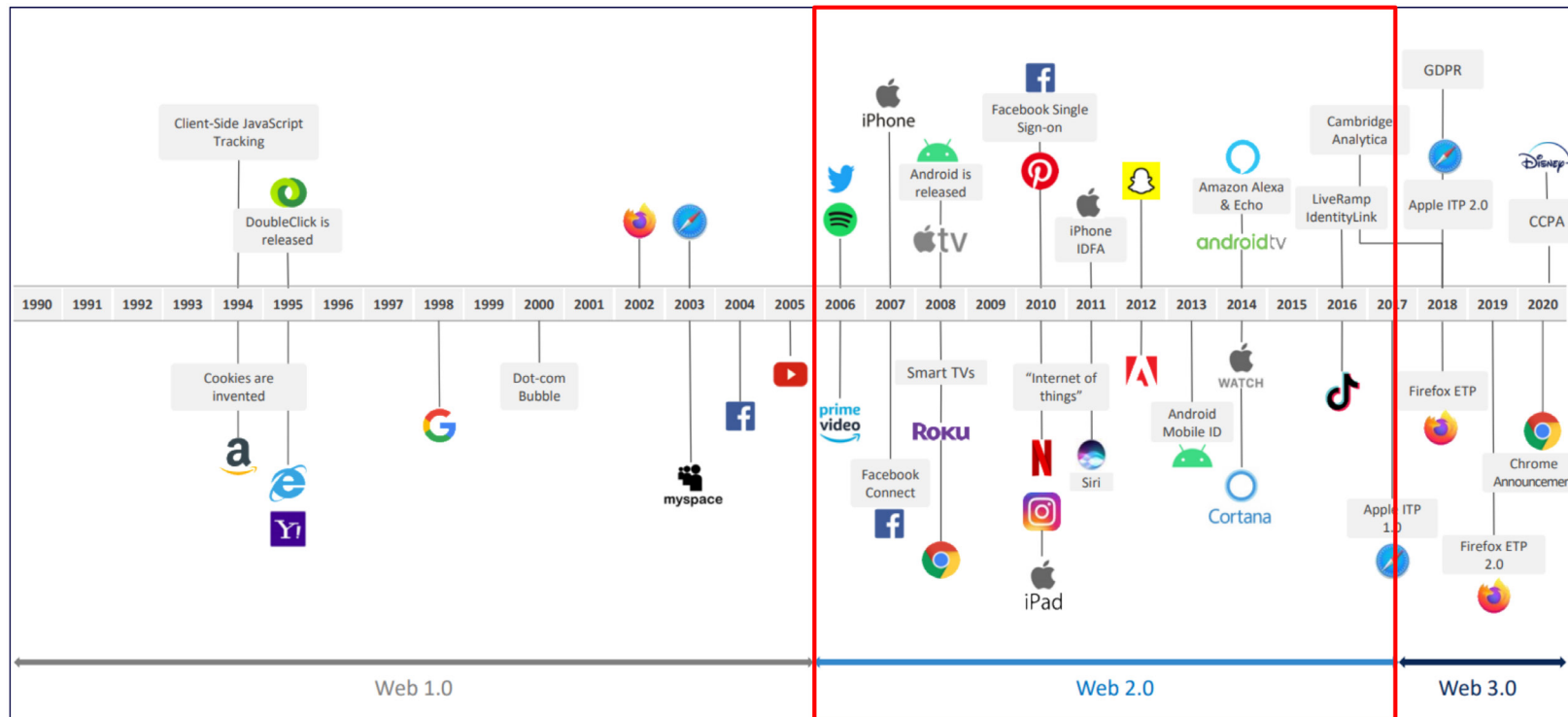
3

### Support of web browsers

In the past few years, web browsers have applied more **restrictions to the use of third-party cookies to limit the tracking capabilities of companies**. In addition, other techniques such as statistical identification and fingerprinting are also being blocked.

# 1 Consumer habits and the adoption of technology

Cookies are an **old technology**, designed by the Netscape engineers in 1994. The digital landscape of those days cannot be compared to that of today. In the 90's there was only one digital touchpoint: the web browsers. With the uprising of Web 2.0, **various touchpoints** such as smartphones, tablets and smart TVs have been added. Since cookies only work for browsers, they are no longer a suitable solution for identifying people. We will therefore have to look for **a new solution to track people in a multi-device world**.



## 2 Data protection and privacy regulations

Additional regulations have been created around the storage of users' personal information. The most well-known example is GDPR, a regulation that came into force in 2018. Meanwhile, **new initiatives** have been launched around the world (such as the CCPA and e-Privacy Directive) **to ensure that consumer's data is properly collected, stored and used.**

Although the GDPR regulations go beyond just the use of cookies, it is one of the catalysts of the cookieless future.



### 3 Support of web browsers

In the past few years, various browsers have increasingly limited the lifetime of these third-party cookies, or even blocked them completely. For example, Apple has been limiting tracking capabilities in their Safari browser through their **Intelligent Tracking Prevention** (ITP) mechanism since 2017. In addition, we see that Firefox has performed the same exercise as Apple, currently blocking cross-site tracking cookies by default.



Next to that, we see **privacy-focused browsers** such as Brave coming to the market, which give the user the opportunity to block any type of tracking of their personal data.

The real catalyst of the cookieless future, however, was an **announcement by Google** in early 2020 in which they said they would stop supporting third-party cookies in their Chrome browser within two years.

In August 2021, Google announced that this change would not be rolled out until the end of 2023. That gives companies some more time to prepare, and of course Google will continue to work on their cookieless solutions.

What *impact* will this  
cookieless future have?

Not all marketing techniques will be equally affected by the ban on third-party cookies. Especially in the world of advertising, we see various techniques such as real-time bidding (RTB) and multi-touch attribution that owe their existence to third-party cookies. These are going to be

heavily impacted and will either not be possible anymore or will have to be done in a different way. Let's take a small deep dive into **several marketing topics that will or will not be impacted by the cookieless future.**

Big impact
RTB advertising (retargeting)
Audience data marketplaces (eg. DV360)
Multi-touch attribution
Frequency and Reach
View-through conversion tracking

Small impact
Web Analytics
App Analytics
On-site personalisation
Marketing automation
Content Management System
Search Engine Optimisation



## RTB advertising (retargeting)

Programmatic advertising and real-time bidding are based on data from third-party cookies. This sector will therefore **have to adapt** in order to stay alive. We see multiple options here, such as a shift to first-party cookies or a shift to contextual targeting for anonymous visitors. Either way, this industry **is here to stay and will remain essential to your marketing mix.**



## Audience data marketplaces

With the disappearance of third-party cookies, the size of the audience you can reach via, for example, Adform or the Google Marketing Platform, will be reduced. This means **the relevance of those audiences will also decrease.** Audience marketplaces will not disappear, but they will probably no longer be based on third-party cookies.



## Multi-touch attribution (MTA)

Attributing value to each touchpoint in the conversion path is a complex exercise. Multiple devices have been in use for a long time within the customer journey, so no multi-touch attribution model can capture the full ad exposure of a single user. The disappearance of third-party cookies will probably be the final blow. As a result, we will **fall back on last-click attribution models** that were often used in the past.

Still, we think that MTA will have an added value within the ecosystems (walled gardens) of the tech leaders Google and Facebook. They have the advantage that the users of their systems are almost always logged on, which enables them to recognise users across multiple devices. This means that you can still carry out **optimisations per channel in terms of keywords, targeting parameters and advertising copy and formats.**





## Frequency and reach

Frequency capping ensures that the same user only sees an ad a limited number of times. Cookies allow us to recognise a user, and therefore monitor the number of times an ad is shown. Without the ability to recognise users, they will see **the same ads more often**, which can lead to a negative association with the brand. At the time of writing, there are no significant alternatives or solutions available.



## View-through conversion tracking

With the disappearance of third-party cookies, we will see a shift from view-through conversion tracking to click-through conversion tracking. This means that, here too, we will **resort to a last-click attribution model**.



## Web analytics

Most analytics platforms will **not be directly impacted** by the ban of third-party cookies. What will affect these platforms, however, are browsers like Safari and Firefox that block cookies (even first-party) from a tracking domain or drastically reduce their lifetime. This means that part of your visitors and their actions will not be measured. You will also see your number of repeat visitors decrease drastically as cookies are only valid for a limited time in most browsers.

To prevent this, you can consider switching to a **server-side tracking implementation**. Do not forget to take the consent of your users into account.



## App analytics

As mentioned above, we do not expect the disappearance of third-party cookies to have a **major impact** on analytics platforms. Something to take into account for app analytics is the iOS 14.5 update, which makes it very easy for end users not to be tracked within apps on their iPhone. This update was introduced in April 2021 and ensures that the data in app analytics platforms is not as reliable as it was before.



## On-site personalisation

Personalisation on your own website **will still be possible**, even after the disappearance of third-party cookies. The reason for this is simple: you use first-party data, based on both cookies and logged data.



## Marketing automation

In marketing automation, the starting point is almost always your own, first-party logged data. As a result, marketing automation as a whole will experience **hardly any impact** from the cookieless future.

In fact, it will only **gain strength** as first-party data will become more and more important for building relationships with your customers.



## Content management system

A content management system (CMS) is used to manage the content of a website. Within a CMS, third-party cookies are never used, so their disappearance is **no problem at all** for your CMS and its operation.



## Search engine optimisation

The optimisation of organic search results is completely unrelated to the use of cookies and will therefore not be affected by the cookieless future. A **good SEO strategy** can, however, ensure that you **drive more traffic to your website**; traffic that you may not be able to reach easily through advertising.

*How do I prepare?*

To measure is to know, even in a future without cookies. To prepare yourself, you need to have a **clear view on the possible impact on your business**. What percentage of your advertising budget is spent on third-party audiences? What is the potential loss of sales or leads if third-party data is no longer available? The answers to these questions largely determine how heavily you will have to adapt your marketing strategies.

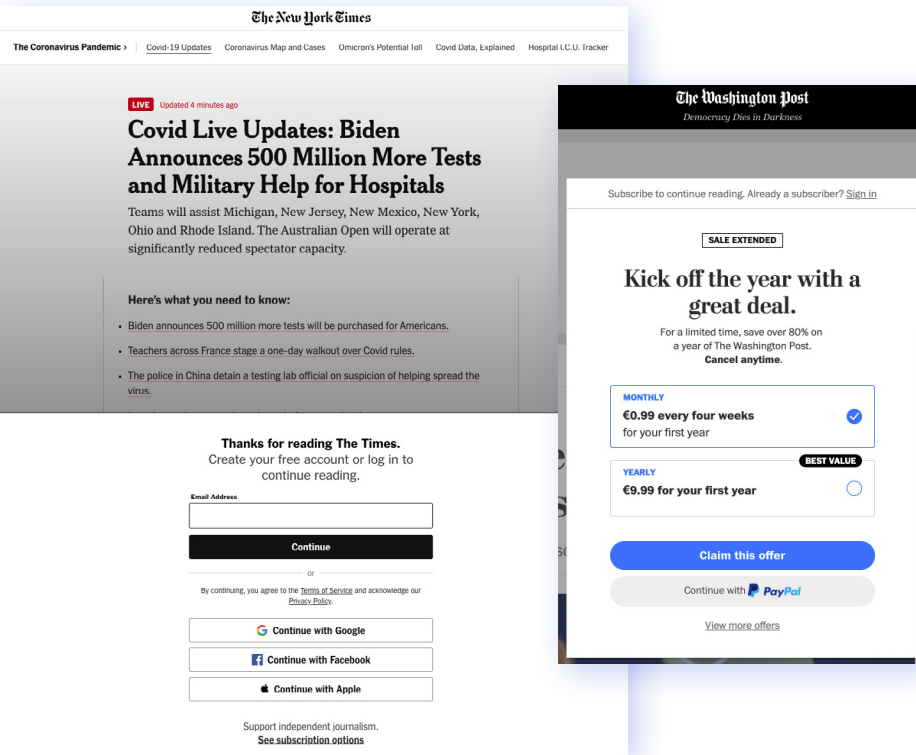
We have listed **some possible solutions or steps you should take** to prepare for a cookieless future below.

## Get your consent management in line

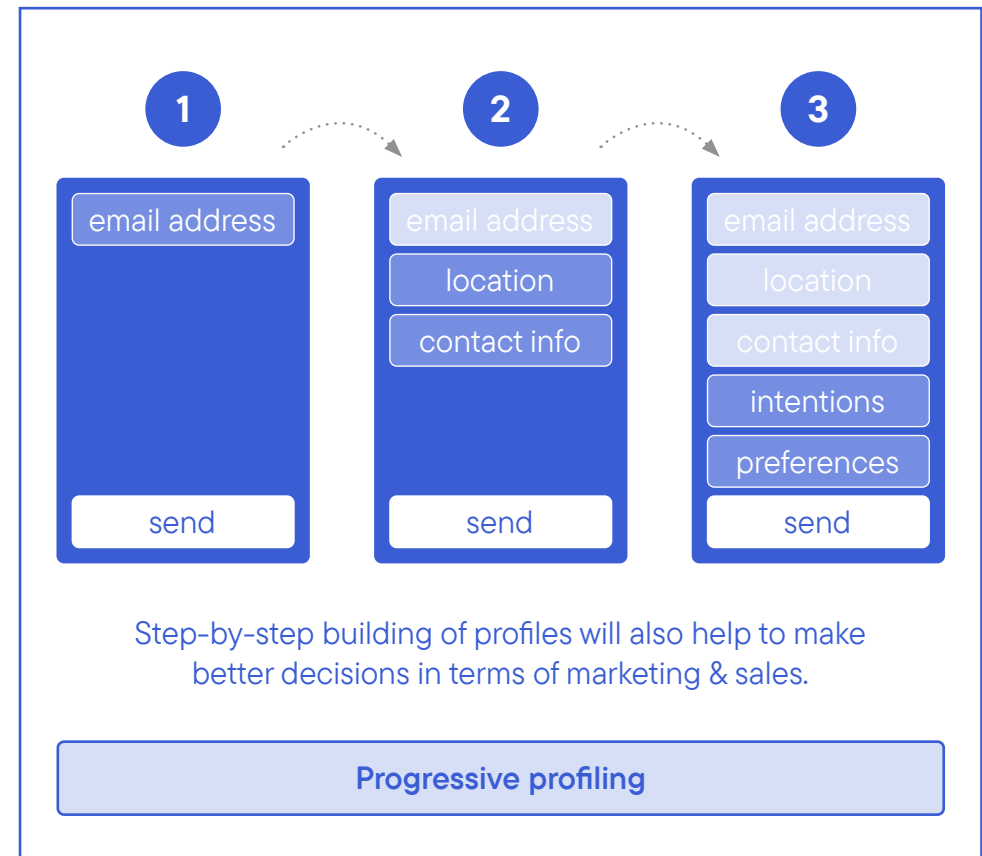
Apart from all the changes in marketing and technology, **getting consent management right on your platforms is crucial**. Companies that prioritise privacy will gain more trust from consumers and will therefore be able to weather this uncertain period.

Consent management goes further than just adding a cookie wall to your website and cookies. An opt-in for a newsletter subscription is also part of that. In order to be able to perform consent management correctly, you must provide a suitable solution across all your platforms.





Collecting an email address is a first step. Also, try to map the interests and behavioural data of visitors that are logged on, which will allow you to personalise their experience. Gradually, you will get a better picture of your visitors and what type of content or promotions appeal to them. A **progressive profiling approach** will become a good strategy for many companies.



## Collection of first-party data

Reaching familiar customers remains as important as ever. Companies should therefore **improve the collection, analysis and activation of their database with first-party data**. For instance, you can think about **gated content**, where you ask the visitor's email address before they can access the content. Several news sites are already doing this and we expect this concept to be applied more and more, and certainly not only to news websites.

## Understand what are your visitors' interests

Of course, you are not going to be able to capture email addresses or other logged data about every single one of your visitors. Therefore, it is important that you know what interests your visitors and potential customers have, so that you can **target them contextually**.

Once you have categorised these interests, you can create inclusion and exclusion lists to ensure more relevant targeting. Don't forget to update these lists regularly to ensure a good inflow of new visitors.

## Review or update your toolstack

Many vendors are adapting their tools in accordance with a cookieless future. For example, various Analytics platforms have already been offering **server-side tracking** solutions for some time, which minimises the effect of browser restrictions.

In addition, we see that advertising platforms have also jumped on the server-side bandwagon. Examples include the **Facebook Conversion API** or

the possibility of adding Google Ads conversions via a server-side tag manager. Combined with the ability to upload their own data for better measurement of results, Google and Facebook are trying to safeguard their dominance.

In addition, Google released their new Analytics platform, **Google Analytics 4**, in 2020. With this platform, they want to make extensive use of machine learning and AI to detect gaps in your data by using modelling. A good set-up of Google Analytics 4 will ensure that you work with the most accurate data and that you can make decisions for your mediamix based on these data.

Besides these two tech giants, we also see local publishers working together. **Ads&Data** was founded in April 2021, while **DPG Media** also announced several collaborations. Be sure to check out if their proposition could be interesting for your business.

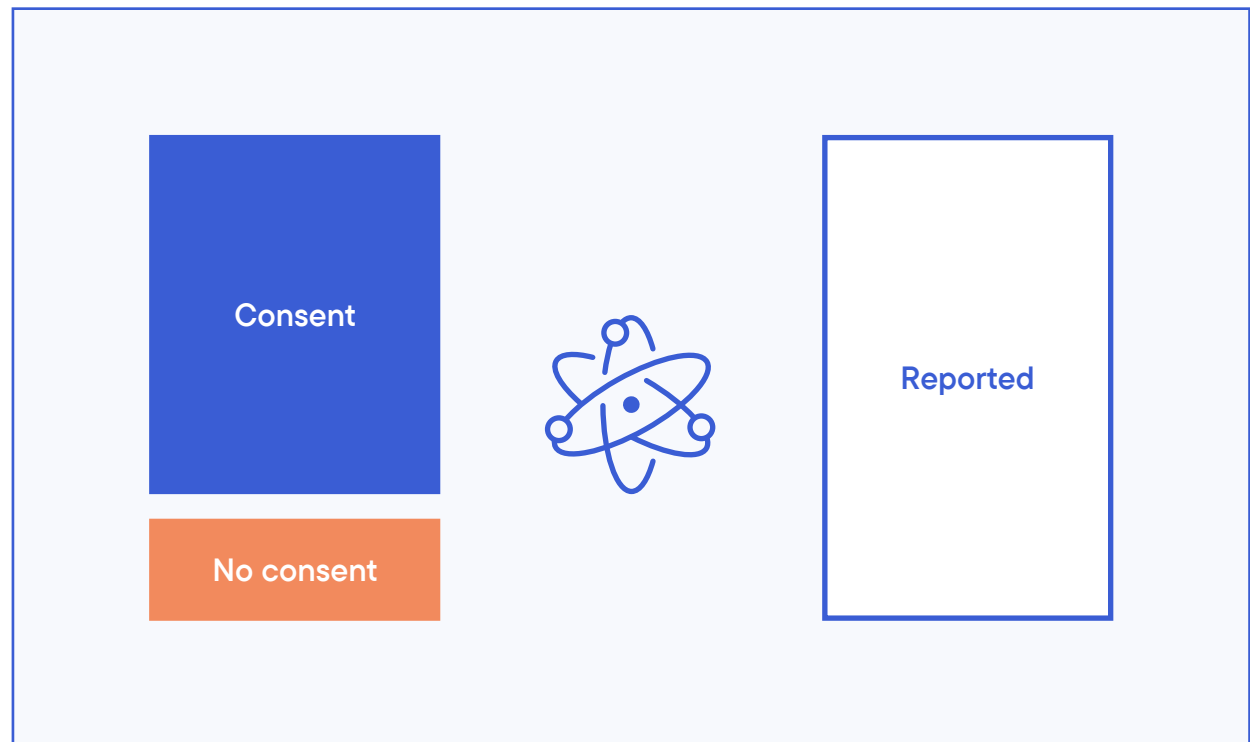
The configuration of tools will only become more complex, as a one-size-fits-all solution does not exist. Therefore, prepare for a new implementation and seek advice in advance.



## Use modelling to fill gaps in your datasets

If your consent management is in good order, you will not be able to monitor a part of your visitors. This means you won't get the full picture of your results in, for example, Google Ads, Facebook Ads or Google Analytics. To fill in the gaps in your data sets, you can do some **modelling**. In 2021, Google launched Consent Mode, which ensures that the interactions of people who have not given their consent are still modelled so that you get a more complete picture of your results. An important side note here is that as an advertiser, you currently have no insight on how many conversions have actually been measured, and how many conversions have been counted via modelling.

Besides Google, Facebook also launched a Consent Mode using the same principles. We recommend **implementing the Consent Mode as soon as possible** in order to limit the loss of data.





## Activate your existing datasets

Most companies have a decent amount of their own data, but get stuck when it comes to analysing and activating it. That is because this data is often stored in separate data silos. A **data warehouse can be the ideal place to compile your data**, analyse it and send it on to other systems.

Consolidating your data should ensure that everyone in the organisation can access and use the right data at the right time. By doing so, you will be able to communicate with your customers in a more relevant way across your digital channels.

## Check whether a customer data platform is useful or not

The greatest strength of a customer data platform (CDP) is the **creation of unified profiles of your customers on which you can take action**. A CDP does not only use cookies, but also logs data such as email addresses and telephone numbers. It is important that all your tools containing customer data are linked to the CDP in order to use its full potential.

Therefore, a CDP seems to be the ideal solution for personalised marketing. However, we do want to point out something here. For many companies, the **high licence fees** and the **time investment** are not really worth it. In fact, you can already make a big profit by making your data available in a data warehouse and building on it. So, definitely check whether a CDP is not too ambitious for your company and look for quick wins.



## Conclusion

Let's be clear, **the cookieless future is a positive thing**. Personalised marketing will not disappear, only the way it is done will change. Just like during the shift from radio to TV or from offline to online communication, there will be winners and losers. If you are well prepared, your company can survive this turbulent period.

The additional awareness surrounding the use of data will ensure that consumers are made aware that companies they have never heard of are storing information about them. This will make people less inclined to leave their data behind. So make sure you have a good **value exchange** for your end user in order to collect data in a fair way.

Many tech vendors have been preparing for a cookieless future for a while now. In this white paper, we talked about the Facebook Conversion API, Google Consent Mode, Google Analytics 4, server-side tracking and CDPs, all of which are partial solutions to get through a world without cookies. **There is no one-size-fits-all solution that will work for everyone**. So take a look at what adjustments are needed for your situation. We are fans of a privacy-minded strategy where you as a company focus on a sustainable way of collecting data about your visitors and customers.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that **transparent consent management** is crucial to retain the trust of your customers, and that consent management goes further than simply implementing a cookie wall.

### Get in touch

- Talk to an expert
- Discuss your ambitions
- Discover *infinite opportunities*

Contact Glenn at  
[glenn.weuts@iodigital.com](mailto:glenn.weuts@iodigital.com)



We are **iO**: a growing team of experts providing end-to-end services for communication and digital transformation. Thinking big, working local. On strategy, creation, content, marketing and technology. In close collaboration with our customers to strengthen their brands, improve their digital systems and secure their future-proof growth.

We don't just help clients achieve their business goals. Together, we explore and exploit the *endless possibilities* offered by markets in a constant state of flux.

The springboard for that vision is talent. Our campuses in the Benelux, Sweden and Bulgaria are our breeding ground for innovation, creating an environment that gives talent the space and stimulus it needs to germinate, develop and flourish.

Because the time to work on tomorrow's *infinite opportunities* is today.

**iodigital.com**  
**info@iodigital.com**

