

# 2008 STUDY: CONSUMER ATTITUDES ABOUT BEHAVIORAL TARGETING

Sponsored by TRUSTe  
Research independently conducted by TNS Global

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Behavioral targeting has become a hot button issue recently, as industry enthusiasm for delivering customized experiences and improved marketing metrics runs up against consumer privacy concerns and calls for greater transparency around emerging tracking and targeting techniques. What concerns arise when consumer browsing behaviors may be tracked for marketing purposes? In February 2008, TRUSTe and TNS Global, examined consumer attitudes about behavioral targeting. Participants answered questions regarding their overall knowledge, concerns and opinions regarding behavioral targeting benefits and activities.

The survey results found that most individuals consider privacy to be an important issue, and they want to take steps to protect their privacy. However, consumer knowledge of behavioral targeting tactics is still limited. Individuals want their advertising to be more relevant and a clear majority appear to know that tracking is occurring. But they say they are uncomfortable if that means their Internet activities are being collected by third parties, even with the assurance of anonymity. Most respond positively to tools such as opt-in and online registries to control targeted advertising. Industry efforts to educate the public will be paramount to preserving the value of targeted and relevant advertising that supports free content while preserving consumer privacy.

## METHODOLOGY

The TRUSTe behavioral targeting survey was conducted online by TNS, a global market insight and information group. TNS randomly selected 3,260 American consumers, aged 18 and older, from among households that belong TNS' 6th dimension Access Panel online. The sample was stratified by eight age/gender groups and each group was selected to be representative of online individuals of that age/gender on geographic division, market size, age, household income, and household size. Email invitations to complete the survey were sent to the panelists on February 1, 2008. When the survey was closed on February 5, a total of 1,015 respondents had completed it, and a further 198 individuals responded after the number of completes required for their age/gender group had been reached. The cooperation rate for the study was 37 percent and the completion rate was 31 percent. The survey data were weighted by region, market size, age, gender, and household size, composition and income, to reflect the demographic composition of the online adult population in the continental U.S. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the TNS consumer panel, rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated.

Individuals want their advertising to be more relevant and a clear majority appear to know that tracking is occurring.

64% of respondents would choose to only see online ads from online stores and brands that they know and trust.



71% are aware that their browsing information may be collected by a third party for advertising purposes.

## RESULTS

### Advertising Relevance

87% say that under 25% of ads that they see while browsing online are relevant to their wants and needs. This is a lesson for advertisers that there is room for improvement when it comes to providing relevant advertising.

64% of respondents would choose to only see online ads from online stores and brands that they know and trust.

72% find online advertising intrusive and annoying when the products and services being advertised are not relevant to their wants and needs.

### Awareness of Behavioral Targeting

40% of respondents say they are familiar with the term “behavioral targeting,” and many more know that some form of tracking is taking place. 71% are aware that their browsing information may be collected by a third party for advertising purposes.

### Attitudes Toward Behavioral Targeting

57% say they are not comfortable with advertisers using that browsing history to serve relevant ads, even when that information cannot be tied to their names or any other personal information.

54% of respondents say they delete their cookies at least 2-3 times a month.

These statistics indicate a high level of discomfort with the idea of tracking, despite industry reassurances that the information is entirely anonymous.

### Intent to Take Specific Actions

96% of respondents say that privacy is at least somewhat important to them. Most think they know about the tools available and say they would take the necessary steps.

Consumers don't seem to be saying they want no part of behavioral targeting at all. When presented with the tools to control their advertising experience, they indicate a willingness to participate in mechanisms to target content and advertising, and/or to limit advertising in general.

- 44% would click a button or icon on a display ad on a site that said “Click here to reduce unwanted ads.”
- 42% would sign up for an online registry to ensure that advertisers are not able to track browsing behaviors, even if it meant that they would receive more ads that are less relevant to their interests.

While the majority desire some form of targeted advertising, it is clear that the lines have not been clearly drawn yet between acceptable and intrusive control and response mechanisms.

40% of respondents say they are familiar with the term “behavioral targeting,” and many more know that some form of tracking is taking place.

55% would be willing to fill out an anonymous survey about the products, services and brands they purchase in order to limit the online ads.

- 55% would be willing to fill out an anonymous survey about the products, services and brands they purchase in order to limit the online ads they see to just those products, services and brands, but 19% decidedly would not.
- 37% would still fill out an survey about products, services and brands they purchase even if it wasn't anonymous.

#### KEY IMPLICATIONS

- Consumers prefer advertising that is relevant and represents brands they know and trust
- There is high level of awareness that behavior is being tracked for purposes of targeting
- Even when anonymous, there is discomfort with tracking and targeting
- Users desire the option to take actions to limit and control targeting

While the promise of relevant advertising appears to appeal to consumers, so does providing control for collection and use of browsing information. As practices evolve additional research, improved transparency, and efforts to educate the public about new technologies for marketing and advertising are required.

## SUPPORTING DATA

I find online advertising intrusive and annoying when the products and services being advertised are not relevant to my wants and needs.	
Strongly Agree	47.8%
Agree Somewhat	24.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	17.9%
Disagree Somewhat	4.7%
Strongly Disagree	4.3%
Don't Know	0.7%
Total	100.0%
If I saw a button or icon on a display ad on a site that said "Click here to reduce unwanted ads," I would click it.	
Strongly Agree	23.0%
Agree Somewhat	20.7%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19.6%
Disagree Somewhat	10.1%
Strongly Disagree	22.1%
Don't Know	4.4%
Total	100.0%
I like seeing ads for coupons or promotions from online stores and brands that I have purchased from before.	
Strongly Agree	13.9%
Agree Somewhat	31.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	26.4%
Disagree Somewhat	11.3%
Strongly Disagree	14.3%
Don't Know	2.3%
Total	100.0%
If given the option, I would choose to only see online ads from online stores and brands that I know and trust.	
Strongly Agree	31.4%
Agree Somewhat	32.8%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23.1%
Disagree Somewhat	5.1%
Strongly Disagree	5.6%
Don't Know	1.9%
Total	100.0%

**SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED**

<b>I would be willing to fill out an anonymous survey about the products, services and brands I purchase in order to limit the online ads I see to just those products, services and brands.</b>	
Strongly Agree	19.9%
Agree Somewhat	35.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23.6%
Disagree Somewhat	9.1%
Strongly Disagree	9.8%
Don't Know	2.4%
Total	100.0%
<b>I would be willing to fill out a survey about the products, services and brands I purchase in order to limit the online ads I see to just those products, services and brands, even if I had to provide personal contact information.</b>	
Strongly Agree	11.9%
Agree Somewhat	24.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	22.2%
Disagree Somewhat	17.6%
Strongly Disagree	21.1%
Don't Know	2.6%
Total	100.0%
<b>When I am online, I am aware that my browsing information may be collected by a third party for advertising purposes.</b>	
Strongly Agree	32.9%
Agree Somewhat	37.6%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.2%
Disagree Somewhat	6.1%
Strongly Disagree	6.5%
Don't Know	2.8%
Total	100.0%
<b>I am comfortable with advertisers using my browsing history to serve me relevant ads, as long as that information cannot be tied to my name or any other personal information.</b>	
Strongly Agree	5.7%
Agree Somewhat	17.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	15.2%
Disagree Somewhat	17.8%
Strongly Disagree	39.4%
Don't Know	4.0%
Total	100.0%



**SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED**

<b>I would sign up for an online registry to ensure that advertisers are not able to track my browsing behaviors, even if it meant that I would receive more ads that are less relevant to my interests.</b>	
Strongly Agree	20.6%
Agree Somewhat	21.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	25.7%
Disagree Somewhat	15.2%
Strongly Disagree	13.9%
Don't Know	3.5%
Total	100.0%
<b>I consider myself knowledgeable about the security risks and threats to my privacy that exist online.</b>	
Strongly Agree	25.8%
Agree Somewhat	48.1%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13.3%
Disagree Somewhat	9.5%
Strongly Disagree	2.5%
Don't Know	0.9%
Total	100.0%
<b>I am aware of the tools that exist online to help me protect my privacy online.</b>	
Strongly Agree	30.4%
Agree Somewhat	43.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14.2%
Disagree Somewhat	7.8%
Strongly Disagree	2.2%
Don't Know	1.5%
Total	100.0%
<b>I would take the necessary steps to protect my privacy online.</b>	
Strongly Agree	60.5%
Agree Somewhat	30.5%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7.4%
Disagree Somewhat	0.7%
Strongly Disagree	0.5%
Don't Know	0.5%
Total	100.0%



## SUPPORTING DATA CONTINUED

What percentage of ads that you see while browsing online are relevant to your wants and needs?	
0-10%	58.3%
11-25%	29.2%
26-50%	8.8%
51-75%	2.4%
76-90%	0.9%
91-100%	0.5%
Total	100.0%
Are you familiar with the term “behavioral targeting”?	
Yes	39.6%
No	51.4%
Don't know	9.1%
Total	100.0%
Privacy can have a different level of importance to different people. For you, personally how important is the issue of online privacy?	
A really important issue that I think about often	54.2%
A somewhat important issue that I think about sometimes	41.6%
Not much of an issue / I hardly ever think about it	4.2%
Total	100.0%
Please indicate how often you delete cookies stored on your computer	
Every Day	14.3%
2 to 3 times a week	13.8%
At least once a week	13.8%
2 to 3 times a month	12.5%
Once a month or less often	30.7%
Never	14.8%
Total	100.0%

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mediarelations@truste.org