

Part 2: A world without cookies? What next?

By [Andrew Smit & Jade Arenstein](#)

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Cookies are incredibly useful. A cookie is the name given to a message sent to a website from a web server that allows web owners to identify users (your computer) and used to improve your web browsing experience. Of course, they are also used as a means to track what users are viewing online.



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While first party cookies send data about you to the owner of the website you are currently browsing, third party cookies send data about you back to a different domain to the one you are on and are used to build user profiles - what you've bought, what you are interested in and they often follow from site to site.



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While useful for ad targeting, there is no doubt that third party cookies are invasive, deny consent, and slow down the browsing experience. For many concerned about their privacy, the faster third party cookies are a thing of the past, the better.

For this reason, and in response to a growing privacy-centric regulatory regime, Google's Chrome will be the latest in a list of browsers looking to ditch third party cookies come 2022, taking their lead from Firefox and Safari which began blocking ad trackers back in 2017.

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What will we do without third party data?

The end of the third party cookie has understandably caused some confusion in the both the ad industry, but also amongst global CMOs.

The massive growth in online advertising is in large part due to the targeting facilitated by third party cookies. They enable market segmentation and attribution - the cornerstones of agile digital marketing.

Unfortunately, even now, there is no consensus about how the market will deal with the end of the cookie.

In an effort to give advertisers an alternative means to track user behaviour, Google is setting up a collection of technologies, assembled under its Privacy Sandbox, which digital marketers can turn to.



Andrew Smit, Head of Data Solutions at Incubeta



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One of the recommended change management tools is durable tagging where Google has broken down different types of cookies based on their 'durability'.

Durability tagging defines third party cookies as the least durable, with these disappearing in the next two years.

First party client side cookies are described as moderately durable, although impacted by browser restrictions.

First party (HTTP) server side cookies, however, are described as the most durable and Google is encouraging organisations to use these for tracking. The company has released a beta version of GTM [server-side tagging](#) and are encouraging users to pull data from servers rather than websites. It has also released a consent mode which facilitates the adjustment of tags when users opt out of tracking.

Businesses should also invest in and develop additional sources of first party data. Enhancing your website's ability to produce user-safe data will improve modelling capabilities which will be a useful tool going forward.

South African companies need to follow global compliance

The complexities of the move towards greater privacy - both in terms of cookies as well as the changes from Apple in the iOS 14 updates (discussed in the first part of the series) - will affect local companies sooner or later. Their digital assets including websites and apps as well as their advertising will be impacted and it is essential they get on top of the global moves sooner rather than later.

Google has put out a number of advisory blogs outlining what companies can do to stay on top of the changes, but there is no doubt that the complexity of the issues requires a guiding hand and technical insight that few companies have in-house. In this regard the role of the digital marketing specialist becomes all the more important.

However, not everything can be left to consultants, and investment in people must be a key focus in the coming months. Building competent data teams as well as bridging the gap between the marketing and data departments will lay the best foundation to handle the changes that we know are coming - as well as the ones that will surely raise their heads in the coming two to three years.

It is also worthwhile noting that things are far from settled amongst the big tech players. A fair amount of speculation abounds that the new technologies developed by Google and other players to overcome the demise of the cookie will end up benefiting them going forward. For its part, Google has released a [blog](#) pledging that it will not build hidden features allowing Chrome to access data that will give it an advantage when it comes to selling ads, but will rather focus on finding ways to help target ads to groups of anonymous users with 'common interests'.



Jade Arenstein, Head of Data Strategy and Analytics at Incubeta

Finally, it's clear the lack of certainty necessitates the need for a solid first person digital strategy. This will be the focus of the third part of our series where we will further unpack the implications of Google's latest announcement and discuss just what is possible using only first party data.

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