

WHITEPAPER

# Making the Holidays Happy: Guide to Evolving Marketing Strategies During COVID



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# A Message from Keith Eadie, VP & GM, Adobe Advertising Cloud

The holiday season is always critical for commerce, but this year it will hold a special importance. Following the past months of social and economic upheaval, weary marketers are under pressure to deliver. At Adobe Advertising Cloud, we understand that advertisers are seeking insights to help guide them through the holiday period. We aim for this report to be a trusted resource as you navigate through the next several months.

As interactions between brands and consumers have become more digital in 2020, Adobe Advertising Cloud has partnered with our brand clients to ensure they have the tools and insights to achieve their goals in this new environment. Brands know that their advertising can no longer operate in a silo. They want to deliver positive and engaging advertising that is seamlessly integrated with their brand's overall marketing strategy. The combination of Adobe Advertising Cloud with other marketing tools in the Adobe Experience Cloud empowers brands to deliver a unified and engaging customer experience with their advertising.

In May of this year, Adobe Advertising Cloud conducted a survey and research into consumer views of advertising during the pandemic. We sought to help retailers find ways to successfully advertise to consumers and meet their needs during the early stages of shelter-in-place. Now, as we enter the holiday retail period, we've initiated a second round of research to understand consumers' current viewpoints as the country progresses through various stages of reopening.

By empowering brand marketers like you with these insights and the real-time intelligence from our software, you'll be better enabled to achieve your goals as we move into the holiday season and beyond.

### Introduction

British Prime Minister Harold Wilson once famously said: "A year is a long time in politics." This statement has never been truer than now. But politics isn't the only thing that has endured a seismic shock over the past year. The economy, society, and the very well-being of every nation has all reeled from one challenge to the next that has tested all of us in some capacity ever since the pandemic started to disrupt the entire world in March 2020.

Earlier this year, we unveiled the results of a <u>comprehensive guide</u> to help brand marketers navigate their way through advertising strategy and execution in the wake of the initial phase of COVID-19. Today, as we rapidly approach the crucial holiday season and live in a period of great confusion around the present- and future- effects of the novel coronavirus on retail and industry,



A year is a long time in politics.

#### **Harold Wilson**

Former British Prime Minister

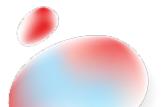
it's time to revisit these findings to determine how consumers have adjusted since spring. It may be a difference of just a few months since our last findings were revealed, but it certainly seems like a lifetime away following periods of stay-at-home orders, varied virus battles, re-openings, reclosings, resistance, and resurgence.

Marketers constantly say that experience matters, but experience can only be delivered when the data to support it is relevant and up to date. What was right just a couple of months ago isn't anymore. If brands are to thrive and survive, delivery of positive experiences is what will allow them to rise above the crowd.

# **Caching the Cash**

Annual holiday e-tail spend has increased at a rapid rate every year since the recession of 2008. With online experiences becoming more engaging and intuitive, and the general economy improving YoY, consumers were in a buoyant mood last year as holiday online retail spend reached a height of almost \$143B, up from \$83B in 2015.

In order to determine the holiday retail opportunity and consumer attitudes, Adobe Advertising Cloud partnered with Advanis, a leading market research company, to survey 1,000 consumers in three markets: The US, UK, Australia. There are strong positives emerging from the findings despite recent headlines. According to the findings, almost 70% of consumers are saving more money than they did pre-pandemic. Consumers with children are even more likely to be saving cash, upping that savings statistic to 74%. We can infer from this response that consumers are nervous – about jobs, elections, the economy and society in general. Those with employment are squirreling away funds in case of issues in the future, while those without employment are struggling. In all cases, saving – or at least spend reduction - is seen as the safest option.



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# Online Shopping as a Trend

Despite the boost in savings and increased anxiety over the future, the study revealed that consumers will make an exception for the upcoming holiday season. Nearly eight in ten consumers are planning to spend at the same levels or more for the holidays, and over 80% report that they'll shop online more or at the same rate than last year. That is due to necessity and convenience or personal preference for online shopping over brick-and-mortar visitation. Retailers can feel confident about the eagerness to celebrate the holidays through gift giving and holiday

purchases even though there is a propensity to save cash across all demographics. But last-minute splurges and extras will be shunned in favor of more selective and targeted purchases. To meet this shift, brands should consider adjusting their distribution channels to ensure that consumers aren't faced with delivery delays, out-of-stock notifications, and general disappointment.

The findings suggest that consumers are waiting for a catalyst to allow them to take a deep breath. This could be in the form of a resurgent economy, the announcement of a vaccine, election results that provide clarity to the country, or a combination of the three. Consumers want to



spend their money; they just need reassurance that they won't get burned if they do so now or into the future. Following months of pent-up stress and challenge, the holiday season is a period when they can celebrate and enjoy. They just need something to light the match under their desire and confidence to spend.

for the holiday this year?

Adobe's Digital Economy Index (DEI), powered by Adobe Analytics, analyzes a trillion visits to retail sites and over 100 million SKUs. Described by CNBC as the 'official tracker of retail sales,' the DEI is a global economic measure for the 21st century that more quickly, comprehensively, and internationally measures the increasing buying power of digital consumers—with greater detail than any other data source available. Since March, the DEI has noted buy-online-pickup-in-store (BOPIS) has continued to see strong YoY growth, with July ticking up slightly (23.3%) over June, amid increases in COVID-19 cases across the U.S. 31% of online consumers prefer using BOPIS or curbside over delivery, making flexible delivery a key differential this holiday season.



of consumers will buy a gift this holiday season.



# **Setting the Tone**

Advertisers will have to tread carefully to find the correct tone for their holiday advertising. Only 1-in-4 consumers are looking forward to holiday advertising, with 20% of respondents professing a lack of desire for any form of holiday messaging whatsoever. In all cases, consumers say that advertising should be tailored to their needs.

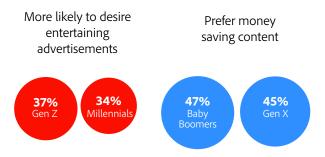
# One-quarter of respondents look forward to holiday ads



Are you looking forward to holiday ads this year?

According to the survey, shoppers are looking for money-saving content, and brand/product info this holiday season – but this does depend on the age demographic being targeted. Gen Z (37%) and Millennials (34%) are **more likely** to desire entertaining advertisements while Gen X (45%) and Baby Boomers (47%) prefer money-saving content.

#### Ad preferences by generation

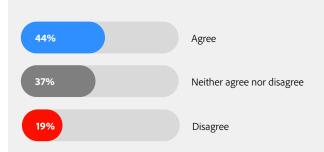


This holiday season, what content would you like to see from a brand?

Toy and child-focused brands will need to walk a very fine line as any ad content that encourages pester power or demand for highpriced toys may be seen as distasteful in light of high unemployment figures and increased demands on household budgets.

Although shoppers say they react positively to companies that modify their messaging to the current health crisis, some are looking for an escape from relentless doom and gloom. Almost 40% of consumers find that ads that take them away from thinking about ongoing issues are more favorable than those that show how companies have responded to the crisis or focus on challenges (26%). Additionally, now 44% of consumers take a brand's COVID messaging into account when making a purchase. This is in contrast to the 72% of those surveyed in June 2020 who deemed staff treatment and COVID messaging important, alongside the 67% who valued that marketing materials should reflect the current state of the world just a few months ago. A difference of three months has seen consumer COVID fatigue emerge, with brand COVID-related messaging resonating far less than it did in spring and summer.

# Considering company's COVID-19 message before purchase



How much do you agree with this statement? This holiday season, I will take a company's COVID-19 response in consideration when purchasing from them.



## Social Cause and Effect

In addition to COVID, America has seen huge consumer adjustments and changes in attitudes following the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and other Black Americans. Consumers now consider brand social justice response and advocacy when making purchasing decisions with over 1-in-3 (36%) shoppers consider a brand's social justice stance when looking to make a purchase, while 29% supporting brands boycotting social platforms. Interestingly, only 17% of consumers are more likely to purchase from a brand if they implement a boycott despite professed support, with the majority (69%) citing indifference. Millennials (22%) are the age group most likely to purchase from a boycotting brand than their generational counterparts.

#### Social Media Brand Boycott Purchasing



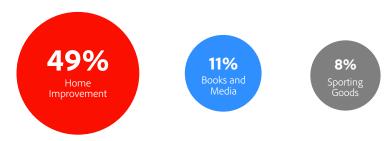
**36%** <u>consider</u> a brand's stance on social justice before purchasing from them.

**29%** indicate <u>support</u> for brands boycotting social platforms

Do you consider a brand's stance on social justice before you buy them? Do you support brands boycotting social platforms? Would a brand boycott on a social media platform make you more or less inclined to purchase with them?

## What to Advertise

Due to continued bans on large group gatherings to support nonpharmaceutical means to fight COVID-19, focus remains on activities and pastimes that are tailored for individuals or small family bubbles. According to Adobe Analytics, home improvement spending is up 49%, while books and media is also up 11% alongside sporting goods 8%. Retailers that have offerings in these categories would do well to deliver ads that feature these products in order to capitalize on increased interest.





Early findings are that apparel may be one category that will be least engaged with by consumers. According to the July DEI report, online apparel growth was up +33% YoY in July, but down significantly from the peak growth the category experienced in May (propelled by Memorial Day weekend sales).

"COVID-19 has changed the world of clothing for both shoppers and retailers. Shoppers moved a huge portion of their apparel shopping online in May and June as they avoided brick-and-mortar stores," says Taylor Schreiner, Director, Adobe Digital Insights at Adobe. "Consumers also changed what they bought: preferring pajamas and sweatpants to work suits. But once people had enough clothes to get them from the couch to the work Zoom and back again, the outsized boost to online clothes shopping went away."

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COVID-19 has changed the world of clothing for both shoppers and retailers.

#### **Taylor Schreiner**

Director, Adobe Digital Insights at Adobe

Retailers may be selling more product, but they're doing so at a far lower price point as they try and rid themselves of outdated stock. While online apparel revenues tend to see seasonal decreases in summer months, apparel revenues fell by more than 50% from May to July—a pace higher than observed for total online retail and early signs are that demand is likely to remain low.

According to Adobe Analytics, athleisure gear saw large-scale demand increases during the early months of the pandemic, with retailers rising to meet customer needs. Numbers have, however, dropped over the summer as the entire clothing sector suffered. Retailers would be best advised to tap into data to spot trends such as the rise of athleisure and comfort-wear early in order to target advertising, creative assets and production accordingly.

If clothing retailers want to remain competitive over the holiday period, discounting will be par for the course, with consumers citing sales offers as the number two rated reason to spend this holiday season at 55%. Advertising that features loss leaders in order to drive eyeballs would serve well. Free shipping, the leading reason driving consumers to spend this season (58%) will most likely be a must in order to complete transactions.

According to Schreiner, "Success for retailers will depend on understanding and adapting to the new normal for consumers. There is an opportunity to define not only what the new normal looks like, but what is the new look for the COVID-19 era and beyond." He advises that for many retailers the best way to deliver that new look will be through pickups and returns to their stores. Longer shipping times have made in-store pickups and exchanges a more competitive option for consumers.





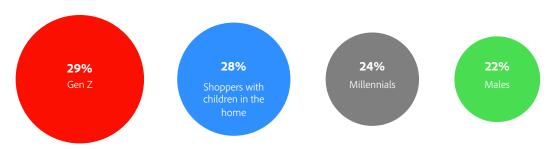
Travel, a deeply impacted industry, is showing glimmers of promise. A DEI analysis of Labor Day travel data found that in the seven days leading up to September 3rd, 2020, there were 19% more flight bookings than the previous seven days before that. In 2019, the comparable timeframe only saw 4% growth, indicating travelers are deliberating until the last minute this year about purchasing a flight. This has potentially positive implications for holiday travel in November and December. Travel brand marketers would do well to save spend until close to departure date in order to secure bookings. Travelers within the Midwest were most willing to travel for Labor Day, and we anticipate that residents of this region will be most open to travel come Thanksgiving and Christmas. Flights originating in the Midwest are only down 39% YoY, while travelers from the Northeast are most reluctant to travel, at -64% YoY. We recommend to adjust spend to focus on areas open to travel.

#### Most likely reasons to choose a new brand this holiday season



Marketers looking to strategize campaigns may be in a stronger position advertising the benefits and value of existing, well-known products or product lines versus new, untested products. Earlier this year, over half of all Gen Z and Millennial consumers expressed openness to trying and/or engaging with new brands. That figure has since dropped, with just 18% of shoppers stating that they are likely to purchase from a new brand this holiday period. This tells us that brands have a massive re-engagement/retention job if they used strategies to acquire new customers earlier in the year during the heights of the pandemic. Customers are getting stuck in their ways again and picking partners they trust. Brands need to do the legwork now to ensure they are on the holiday nice list and not the naughty one.

#### Most likely demographics to buy from a new brand



# Same, Same but Different

Since our previous report detailing consumer views of advertising during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic released in June 2020, there have been many changes in consumer advertising perception. Here are five of the main differentials to note:

- 1. Online shopping is up, but fewer consumers reported shopping more online than in our June report. 39% of shoppers are purchasing products online more than before the state-by-state shutdowns caused by COVID-19. According to Adobe's July 2020 Digital Economic Index report, the pandemic resulted in \$93.9 billion extra spent online since March. Compared to the June 2020 DEI report, this is a drop as fewer shoppers reported shopping more online than before COVID-19 (39% in the July 2020 report versus 54% in the June 2020 report). This may be due to increased reopening of brick-and-mortar store locations or because of increased pressure on household accounts as furloughs and unemployment affected family budgets. This inference is backed up by the July 2020 DEI report, which found that states that are reopening are seeing smaller increases in online spend (average of 8%) than states that are maintaining stricter lockdown protocols.
- 2. A brand's COVID-19 response is important, but not as critical as in June. Over 2-in-5 (44%) shoppers agree they will factor a company's COVID-19 response before deciding to purchase. In contrast, 72% of those surveyed in the Adobe Advertising Cloud June 2020 report deemed staff treatment important, alongside 67% who valued that marketing materials should reflect the current state of the world.

- 3. Consumers now are indifferent to messaging with COVID-19. Under 1-in-3 (32%) shoppers express positivity when brands alter their message to reference COVID-19, albeit the majority (56%) are neutral. Interestingly, 48% surveyed in Adobe Advertising Cloud's June 2020 Consumer report expressed positive sentiment, while only 38% expressed neutrality, signifying a shift from appreciation to indifference.
- 4. Less focus on buying new brands than before; retention and re-engagement will be key. Only 18% of shoppers are likely to purchase from a new brand this holiday period, citing reasons such as advertising (26%), word of mouth (24%), and necessity (24%). Gen Z (29%) and Millennial (24%) shoppers are more likely to purchase a new brand this holiday season, alongside males (22%) and shoppers with children in the home (28%). The Gen Z statistic is in marked contrast to the June 2020 report when 50% of Gen Z and 53% of Millennial respondents stated they would be willing to purchase or actively sought our new brands.
- 5. **Economic instability continues.** 34% of respondents say that they are now no longer working or have had employment hours reduced since June 2020.



### When to Advertise

Concerns around the speed and efficacy of postal services this year mean that shipping messages will be critical. With more demand expected on e-tailers to make up for lost brick-and-mortar traffic, shipping services are sure to be inundated. Cutoff dates for guaranteed shipping are likely to be far earlier than usual, with sales kickoff dates also starting earlier as a result.

With value being a key driver this year, advertisers would do well to focus on what consumers are looking for, namely free shipping, discounts, product range, and availability. Unlike previous years, avoid campaigns that drive consumers into shops for Black Friday-style, in-store experiences. In fact, many retailers such as Walmart are closing for Thanksgiving in order to ensure the safety and security of its staff and customers during this traditionally busy sales period.

Last year, the shortened holiday sales period saw initial sales announcements emerge around Halloween week. This year could see holiday sales launching as early as mid-October, with online ad prices increasing on premium inventory to meet demand. Marketers will need to stretch ad dollars to cover more time and won't be able to pack buys into a few days. Segmentation and datadriven advertising will be critical at finding customers when they are ready to purchase. This could be when/if a new/hot product launches, when pay days hit, if there are movements in vaccine development, when airlines report upticks in family travel to see relations or any of hundreds of other influences.

This year's sales battle will very much be online and advertising budgets should reflect the drive towards e-commerce. Adobe Analytics is predicting that online retail spending for 2020 will match that of 2019 by

October 5th – almost a month before the traditional holiday sales season kicks off.

Savvy retailers know that the seismic shift to online shopping is no longer just talk. It has very much happened, and marketers need to adjust their campaigns to reflect the move away from in-person shopping. Every brick-and-mortar retailer has to become an ecommerce player ready to serve customers wherever and however they want. They'll need to consider strong enticements to draw in shoppers, such as location-based offers and discounts or unique only-in-store experiences that are tailored right down to the individual consumer level in order to be effective.

Additionally, they will also need to adjust market-by-market as the pandemic revives, dies or forces additional stay-at-home measures. What might be right for New York may not be suitable in Miami. A nationwide campaign simply won't work under these conditions. Monitoring daily news and virus rates should become a must if it isn't already. When COVID-19 case numbers drop or gain, marketers need to be ready to dial up or dial down spend as they ready for state-level restrictions or opportunities. Factors such as unified profiles and real-time audience personalization are critical in this world to meet customers wherever they choose to engage.

Online retail spending for 2020 will match that of 2019 by October 5th – almost a month before the traditional holiday sales season kicks off.

Adobe Analytics data



## Where to Advertise

Since March, there have been massive shifts in how consumers consume content – and large-scale shifts in auction volume data to meet those shifts. Auctions, or bid requests as they are also known in the industry, are used as a guidance metric for user behavior and content consumption as more users on a page or watching a video player leads to more ad opportunities, pinging more auctions to our system. At Adobe Advertising Cloud, we record auctions when a supplier sends requests for ad responses, indicating that there is an ad opportunity that we can bid for.

In the US, we examined the averages of two timeframes (February 10-14, 2020 and August 16-22, 2020) in order to compare and contrast what the auction volume data is telling, and we saw massive jumps in some key channels.

CTV	<ul> <li>Increased 59.1%</li> <li>CTV is up the most during "mealtimes", 11 AM - 2 PM, 5 PM - 8 PM</li> </ul>
Display	<ul><li>Increased 24.1%</li><li>Biggest spikes between 5 AM</li><li>8 AM</li></ul>
Mobile video	<ul><li>Increased 9.9% overall</li><li>Spikes from 5 AM - 7 AM</li></ul>

Ad Cloud Auction Volume Data, averages of Feb 10-14 to Aug 16-22, 2020.

Just as shopping methods have changed, so have the ways in which to engage with consumers. According to shoppers in our study, they find premium channels such as national news sites (42%) and cable TV (38%) and connected TV (37%) to be the most credible and trustworthy. There are, however, variances

#### Most visited channels and credibility

#### Channels visited the last 30 days

# 56% 49% 41% 40% 26% 17% 12% 10%

Connected TV
Social Media/News Feeds
Online Searches
Online Video Sites
Cable TV
National News Sites
Name Brand Properties
Lifestyle News & Magazine Websites
Small Properties

# (Selected Top 3) 37% 19% 36% 20% 38% 42% 26% 19%

Credibility and trustworthiness

Which types of channels have you watched or visited in the past 30 days? How credible or trustworthy do you find ads on the following channels?

country-by-country. The majority of British consumers (57%) find ads on national news channels to be more credible, much higher in comparison to the US (37%) which is undergoing major attacks on the credibility of its mainstream media sources. Nearly half of Baby Boomers consider cable TV ads to be more credible than connected TV ads (47% vs. 32%), which also reflects usage rates within this demographic. Only 19% of surveyed consumers perceive communications from social media channels as credible and trustworthy. So, while targeting via social may be incredibly effective, it may not be the best channel for new brands looking to establish credibility in a crowded market. Social should still be in the media mix but is a better option for established brands looking for recognition and engagement rather than to build new consumer support or to establish new product lines.

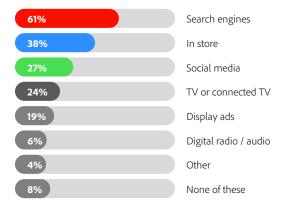
# Search and Ye Shall Find

Marketers have been preaching that omnichannel strategies are a must for a while now, but the effects of the pandemic and changes in shopping behavior have now transformed it from a should to a must.

As we approach the holiday season, shoppers reported spending most of their time on connected TV (48%) and cable TV (39%), while attributing greatest impact on purchasing from online search (41%). The ramp up to peak holiday season should see little change from this as over 3-in-5 (61%) consumers expect to use search the most to find products this holiday season. In fact, 71% of Baby Boomers indicate using search as their main anticipated method to research products, making this advertising channel a must to tap into the generation that arguably has the most expendable cash and the least prevalence to

trying new brands. Other top discovery methods are in-store (38%), social media (27%), TV / connected TV (24%), and display ads (19%).

# Top channels consumers will use to research and find products this holiday season



How do you anticipate you'll research and find the products you'll buy this holiday season?

According to consumers in the survey, search (41%) will also be the channel that has the biggest impact on purchase decisioning as shoppers use search engines to find what's right for their needs and to compare products and prices. Relevant search ads will be critical to help consumers find what they are looking for because that will be the first port-of-call for many. Other big purchase impact drivers include:

- TV / connected TV (both 34%)
- Social media (27%)
- Online video sites (24%)
- Premium channels like national news sites and lifestyle magazine sites (21% each)

There is also correlation between the channels that customers find the most credible (TV, search) and their impact on buying. This reflects the findings of the Adobe Advertising Cloud/YouGov research into Premium vs Non-



Premium inventory released earlier this year in which video ads were rated higher across all measurements when compared to non-premium inventory offerings. The study determined that consumers found ads on premium inventory were more credible, appealing, trustworthy, and believable than their non-premium counterparts.

# **How to Advertise**

Now that we have established that there are distinct opportunities for advertisers to capitalize upon this holiday season, it's time to address the "how".

Create affinity and awareness within target audiences through channels like connected TV. Focus on targeting high-value consumers who will want to see messages, or those who have bought from your brand before to reengage at the right time. Here is where an experience platform will help. By knowing the complete journey of target consumers, from initial search, site and content engagement through to loyalty and post-transaction interaction, marketers can better understand what a customer wants, when they want it, and the method they prefer to use to make purchases and come back for more. Knowing when to target is just as important as knowing what to target and to whom.

At the time of search, use first-party data to match audiences and bid effectively on high-value customers based on intelligence known about the customer. Review unified reporting throughout the campaign to understand performance.

Once a search campaign is completed, use the insights to understand the next best message, understand on-site behaviors and whether to re-engage or cross-sell. If your brand uses a content management solution, tie advertising

strategy to content delivery to ensure that customers who come back to a site via search are shown digital assets that meet their needs. Drive consumers to pages that engage with their shopping desires rather than have them have to hunt and search for the content or products they are looking for.

Search can provide critical insights about what someone searched for versus what they purchased on site. For example, a value-based search offer may have drawn a customer in, but if they went for an upgraded final purchase, the decision to purchase premium gives marketers critical insight into the mindset of that individual customer and helps deliver assets for an improved on-site experience the next time they log on to a retailer's website.

Unifying data is the next step in the effective advertising chain to get a handle on how customer journeys are changing. Brands that unify their data so every engagement is collated into a single customer profile can move with their customers as their circumstances and the macro circumstances evolve. For example, a solution such as the Adobe Experience Platform takes learnings gained from the website along with engagements with digital advertising and layers intelligence from offline customer touchpoints in order to deliver messages that matter. If brands operate in data siloes, their efforts will be more fragmented, and they won't be able to adapt as quickly. Operating and delivering by leveraging at the individual, unified customer level is critical because we don't know how this holiday period is going to play out. And having a complete view of the customer and the customer journey they are on is important in order to truly engage and deliver positive experiences.

# Top 5 Takeaways

#### 1. Know your market

Adjust advertising tone to suit the market you are trying to appeal to. If your product is aimed at younger users, humorous or carefree messaging that takes people away from daily troubles will appeal. Families and older markets will prefer more direct, useful, and practical advertising.

#### 2. Know your offer

Focus on discounts and free shipping, rather than added value, gift with purchase, or BOGO offers. Shoppers will be persuaded by knowing they will get what they order on time at a good price point.

#### 3. Know your strategy

Take an audience customer journey-based approach. Consumers are telling us in the survey to start with search and building from there is a preference, but it might not be right for all as every path to purchase is different. Leveraging unified profiles is critical.

#### 4. Know viewing habits

Despite attacks on media, national news sites and TV (either connected or cable) are where your market will be looking for ideas and options.

#### 5. Know how to target

Personalization and localization are vital this season. One size fits all campaigns won't work. Don't go nationwide – go state by state, even city-by-city with messaging and offers where possible.

# Methodology

#### Who participated in this research:

1006 consumers completed the survey online in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia.

To qualify, respondents had to:

- Own an electronic device
- And be a resident of the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia

#### How was the research conducted:

- Participants were recruited from an actively managed online panel
- Research was conducted between August 11, and August 14, 2020





#### **About Adobe Advertising Cloud**

Adobe Advertising Cloud is the only independent ad platform that unifies and automates all media, data, audiences, and creative at scale. Deliver connected experiences across all advertising channels, including paid search, display, video, CTV, audio, native, and creative management. Adobe Advertising Cloud elevates advertisers' media strategies through advanced first-party data segmentation and activation capabilities, premium and differentiated inventory, and an intuitive cross-channel management experience.

