

# The origins and evolution of advertising

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



In an age where nearly everyone has access to the internet and uses some form of social media, we have never been more susceptible to targeted advertising than we are right now. Companies all over the world analyze what we view on the internet and then use that information to display ads that they believe are of interest to us. This is supposed to be a beneficial feature for the user but in fact has been getting a lot of scrutiny in the news recently. However, this problem has been around for longer than one might imagine.

In 1999, the New York Times started using a targeted advertising approach which for the most part, seemed very beneficial to its customers. There were questions regarding privacy but it all seemed very minor. However, as technology became more and more advanced, major flaws with this system developed as companies discovered how powerful they can be. It is hard to tell what the advertising industry will look like in the future, but the fact of the matter is that something about it needs to be changed so that major corporations can't abuse their advertising power anymore.

The concept of advertising has been around since the ancient Egyptians carved their advertisements on steel sheets [1]. It constantly evolved until it became the massive industry as we see it today. However, the use of targeted advertising is a fairly recent development, and one that comes with a lot of issues. In an article written in 1999 by Max Frankel of the New York Times Magazine describing its on-line news services, he explains how the Times uses a targeted advertising approach for companies advertising on their website. The Times registered its Web subscribers by age, income, gender, and ZIP code and analyzed the actions of said subscribers on their

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website such as what they read and how long they look at certain ads for. This information was then readily available for advertisers to use however they saw fit [2].

The New York Times claimed that their user's information is secure, but the internet is a very insecure place and no matter what is done, once information is out there, it is nearly impossible to get it back. Privacy on the internet has always been a problem and as technology advances, the possibilities that these companies have of gaining personal information is at an all-time high. If almost 20 years ago companies could obtain as much personal information about someone as the Times did, there must be far more available today that companies can easily use to their advantage. There are more ways than ever for companies to watch our moves on the internet, from analyzing our viewing habits to reading what we send in an email. There has even been speculation about companies listening to what we say out loud through our cell phones and home speaker systems. Even though they may only be using this information for advertisement, the fact that they can obtain it without anyone knowing is very off-putting as the more information companies gather, the more likely that information can fall into the wrong hands.

As the internet grew over the years, so did the use of targeted advertising. What was once a process used to give the consumer a more enjoyable time on the internet has now turned into a very controversial subject that seems to be in the news a lot recently. This change can most likely be attributed to the dependence of social media in our technology-based society. In addition

to a lack of privacy, many people are concerned that companies are discriminating against certain groups of people when posting ads on the internet. A report by a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison stated that Facebook, one of the most popular forms of social media today, has been accused of discriminating against ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ individuals and other similar groups. These groups were given less chances to receive benefits such as housing and job opportunities due to this discriminatory advertising. Additionally, it is believed that a Russian group linked to the Kremlin used Facebook's advertising features to identify African-American voters and attempted to discourage them from voting in the 2016 presidential election saying " No one supports Black People. Don't go vote" [3]. This system is not only illegal but morally wrong as it can easily be abused in a negative manner with no repercussions. Even though Facebook has agreed to remove these features, what's to say that other websites and social media companies can't do the same thing that Facebook did.

When companies are believed to be abusing their power by only advertising to certain people or obtaining users personal information without their knowledge, it is easy to see why many people are attempting to remove ads from their lives. From the rise in popularity of online streaming services like Netflix, to the fact that there is some sort of ad blocker on nearly every computer today, more and more people are following this trend which I believe has at least something to do with the methods used to advertise nowadays. In response to this, companies must adapt to society in order to survive, which may result in the end of traditional advertising. Instead, they

will need to start building a community around their product and build trust within that community. Many companies are already starting to move in this direction such as GoPro, who instead of using traditional, buy-my-product-because-it-is-good advertising, they advertise with real, user-created videos, and Patagonia, who encourages their customers to send back their used clothing to get repaired, instead of purchasing new products [1].

Both companies attempt to prove to the consumer that their product is great instead of telling them that it is. I think that more and more companies will start advertising similarly, making the future of advertising one that is beneficial to both producers and consumers. We live in a world that is reliant on the internet and even though it is extremely beneficial to society, we must be careful. Targeted advertising does in fact have many benefits that make a user's internet experience more enjoyable, but the fact that corporations can obtain mass amounts of information about someone and use that information to favor some groups of people while leaving others in the dust shows that a new form of advertainment needs to arise. Since the first television ad popped up in 1941 to the creation of the very popular Marlboro Man in the 1970s, the history of the ad industry proves that as humans become more advanced, it is up to the companies to change their advertising methods to better suit society [1].

Instead of selling a mentality or a character on a box, advertisers are now focusing on building a community around their brand. Companies like GoPro and Patagonia show that this can be done and that in the end, a new form of

advertisement may be more beneficial. We cannot know for certain if this is true, but it seems to be a step in the right direction.