Google’s Latest Privacy Changes Will Conceal ‘Contextual Content’ on AdX

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Google has announced upcoming changes to its ad auction process. Advertisers won’t be able to see the “contextual content” of the inventory they are bidding on after consultation with regulators.

The updates mean that media buyers participating in ad auctions on Google’s ad exchange won’t be able to see certain types of content categories, such as news or weather, of the third-party websites they are bidding on. Such content categories have helped advertisers identify the types of content where they want to serve ads next, plus avoid bidding on ad space on websites that are not suitable for their brand. Google already applies a host of data restrictions on its real-time bidding platform, such as requiring publishers to obtain user consent and obscuring users’ IP addresses, that limit advertisers’ ability to track users.

Advertisers will only be see what they are allowed to as governed by the legislation. These new data restrictions prohibit advertisers from using Google’s ad stack to build user profiles around sensitive categories, according to Chetna Bindra, senior product manager, user trust and privacy at Google.

In a blog post Bindra said the pending update to its ad exchange—popularly known as AdX—would help avoid the risk of auction participants associating individual identifiers with

Google’s contextual content categories: “Following our engagement with data protection authorities, we have decided that beginning in February 2020 we will no longer include contextual content categories in the bid requests we send to buyers participating in our auction.”

Google has made the policy decision as a result of consultations with numerous data protection authorities. Bindra made specific mention that Google must fall under General Data Protection Regulations in the European Union.

“We’ll also update our E.U. user consent policy audit program for publishers and advertisers, as well as our audits for the Authorized Buyers program,” she added.

The update also coincides closely with the pending California Consumer Privacy Act. Microsoft this week announced it would apply these regulations across the U.S. starting Jan. 1, 2020; representatives in the House of Congress are proposing similar federal legislation.

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