



Publisher Readiness Playbook

Navigating the Privacy,
Data, & Identity Landscape

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Introduction

Collecting, connecting, and applying consumer data has long powered digital advertising. But growing and piecemeal privacy scrutiny has reshaped the strategies required for success. Apple's many changes (e.g., 3rd-party cookie deprecation, ATT¹ mobile "tracking" opt-in), Google's ongoing privacy pivots (evolving Privacy Sandbox components and Chrome controls for cookies), and laws expanding in the US and globally² highlight that the era of substituting one workaround for another or shifting focus to less privacy-protected channels is ending. Despite this, many publishers are maintaining legacy practices and treating privacy-forward approaches as optional.

The ability to identify unique consumers and their attributes and actions for advertising purposes is eroding. As a result, the ecosystem is increasingly moving to identity-less solutions as the baseline expected by consumers, legislators, and platforms. While identity-based advertising will not disappear, the ability and onus for using ID-based data will be increasingly tied to consumer choice and consent. Where these expectations are not met, data will only be available in aggregate and often only reported after a delay.

The time is now to engage with and implement privacy- and consumer choice-oriented solutions – ID-less and ID-based – whether you intend to maintain some existing practices, adopt new solutions, or a combination.

A change of this magnitude means tactical shifts to patch holes are no longer sufficient. Publishers, marketers, and everyone in between must reset advertising strategies.

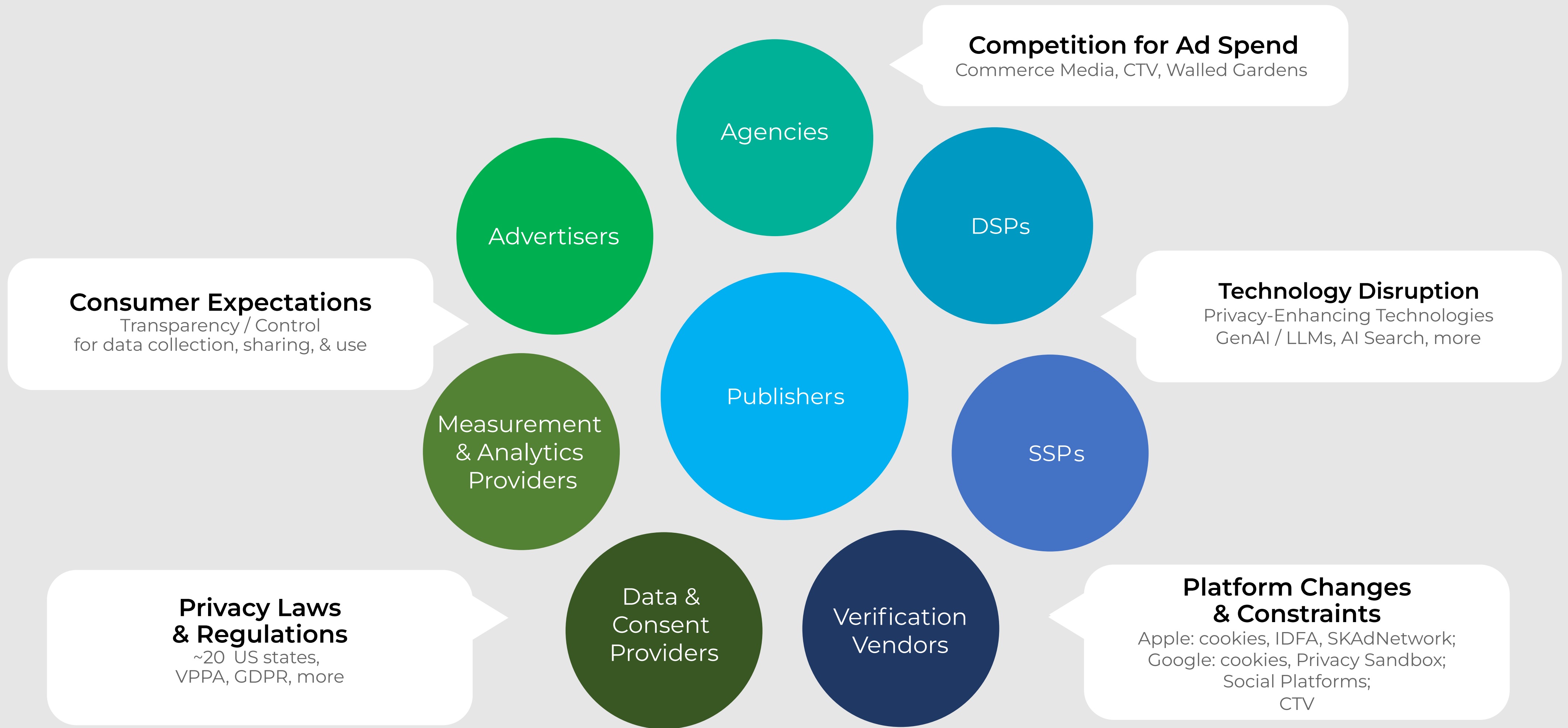
Why This Playbook?

To help you decipher and navigate the impacts and opportunities associated with changing regulations, technologies, platform capabilities, and other solutions, ThinkMedium (www.thinkmedium.tech) offers a Readiness Strategy Program, which includes this Playbook. As domain experts with deep industry engagement, we can allow you to focus on protecting and growing your business. (Note that for any legal considerations, we recommend you consult relevant counsel; we are not providing legal advice.)

¹ [App Tracking Transparency | Apple Developer Documentation](#)

² [IAPP Global Privacy Law and DPA Directory, IAPP US State Privacy Legislation](#)

Changes Affecting Publishers and the Rest of the Advertising Ecosystem



Our Approach:

A portfolio of ID-based and ID-less solutions

To determine how to take action, consider two classes of the available solutions:

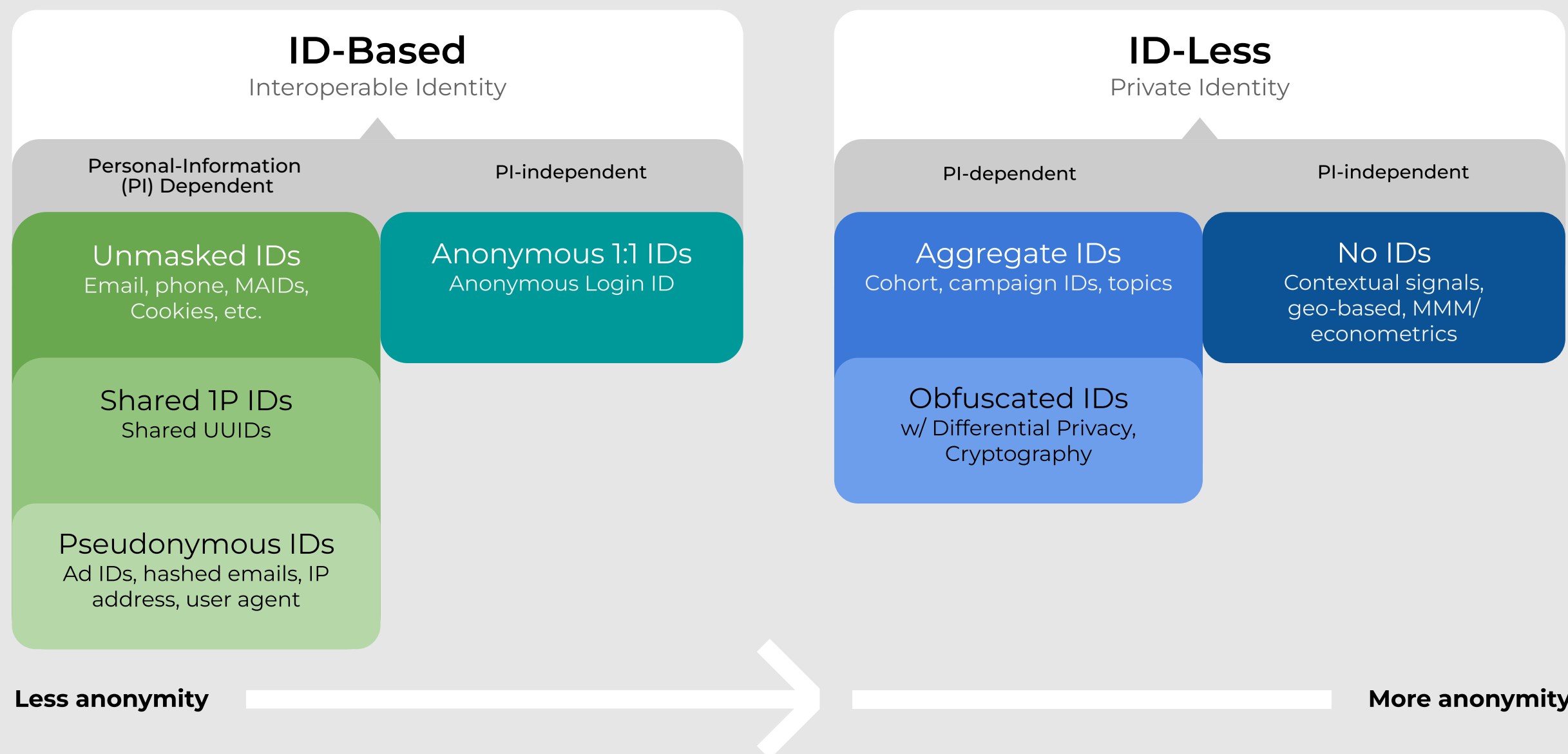
ID-based solutions:

Products or services that identify a person or household and related data across digital environments, and connect said identity across partners using a unique identifier, such as a cookie, device-based advertising ID, IP address, email, anonymous ID, or universal ID (e.g., The Trade Desk's UID2, LiveRamp's RampID).

ID-less solutions:

Products or services that rely on consumer data (consented as needed) shared in an aggregated, unidentifiable form to entities that did not initially collect it. ID-less solutions can vary from foundational technologies—such as those from Apple or Google—to solutions such as contextual targeting or curated audiences.

Overview of the ID-based and ID-less Landscape



Ultimately, no single ID-based or ID-less solution will solve all advertising use cases or make sense for all ecosystem players. You need to develop a portfolio of privacy-forward ID-based and ID-less solutions and strategies for taking advantage of your assets and selecting the most effective partnerships. The challenge can seem daunting: it is technically complex, core platform technologies are still evolving, and the up-front investment can be significant. And while it presents risks to your business, ID-less technology also affords opportunities for those willing to bet on a future ad tech ecosystem that may operate markedly differently than it does today.

The fundamental technical changes already in progress to adapt to the new landscape affect every part of your business: audience packaging, yield optimization, and attribution and reporting. As a result, the risks to your revenue, margin, and return can be considerable. Remedial and forward-looking strategies are needed to avoid several risks:³

- Greatly degraded behavioral advertising and less effective interest-based targeting
- Gaps in the ability to cap frequency
- Reduced measurement and attribution (reporting)
- Suboptimal yield management
- Decreased CPMs

³ See [IAB Tech Lab Privacy Sandbox Assessment](#) for more details on what gaps are expected in Chrome

As these are changes industry wide, there are opportunities for disruptive thinkers to find new dynamics, “tilt the playing field” in their favor, and foster a new industry equilibrium. For example, how will ID-less solutions impact your dependence on Google technologies? The impacts and timing of Privacy Sandbox are still shifting and are highly scrutinized...but is there a way to apply these technologies to improve your ad operations, improve margins, and gain advantage with legacy partners? While most press is focused on threats, what could your most innovative staff do if they really took a fresh view?

As a publisher, you are also well positioned to achieve gains and recover control through your direct relationships with consumers and your greater agency in selecting ID-based or ID-less solutions. But protecting and growing your revenue requires using the runway during this period of uncertainty to test and rethink your strategy holistically, including use of ID-based solutions. Early movers will gain strategically defensible advantage; those who lag risk falling behind competitors who have mastered new approaches to revenue maximization.

“ Publishers are looking for updated industry benchmarks and signals in this evolving environment, including insights on the adoption pace of Privacy Sandbox APIs by their peers, or healthy Ads-to-Content-Ratio. ”

Mike O'Sullivan at Sincera

Our Framework: Readiness Review

Readiness Review Framework

Advertising Use Cases

Audience Packaging | Yield Optimization | Attribution & Reporting

Platforms & Technologies

Tech: Identity, Activation, Security, etc.
Platforms: OS/Browser, Social, CTV

Data Strategy / Assets

Data Assets
Data Relationships
Identifiers

Solutions & Partners

Identity, Activation, Security, etc.

Business & Organizational Impacts

This Playbook is centered around our **Readiness Review** framework that can provide insight into addressing gaps and aligning your teams to adjust to the latest shifts in our industry—and their impact on your business.

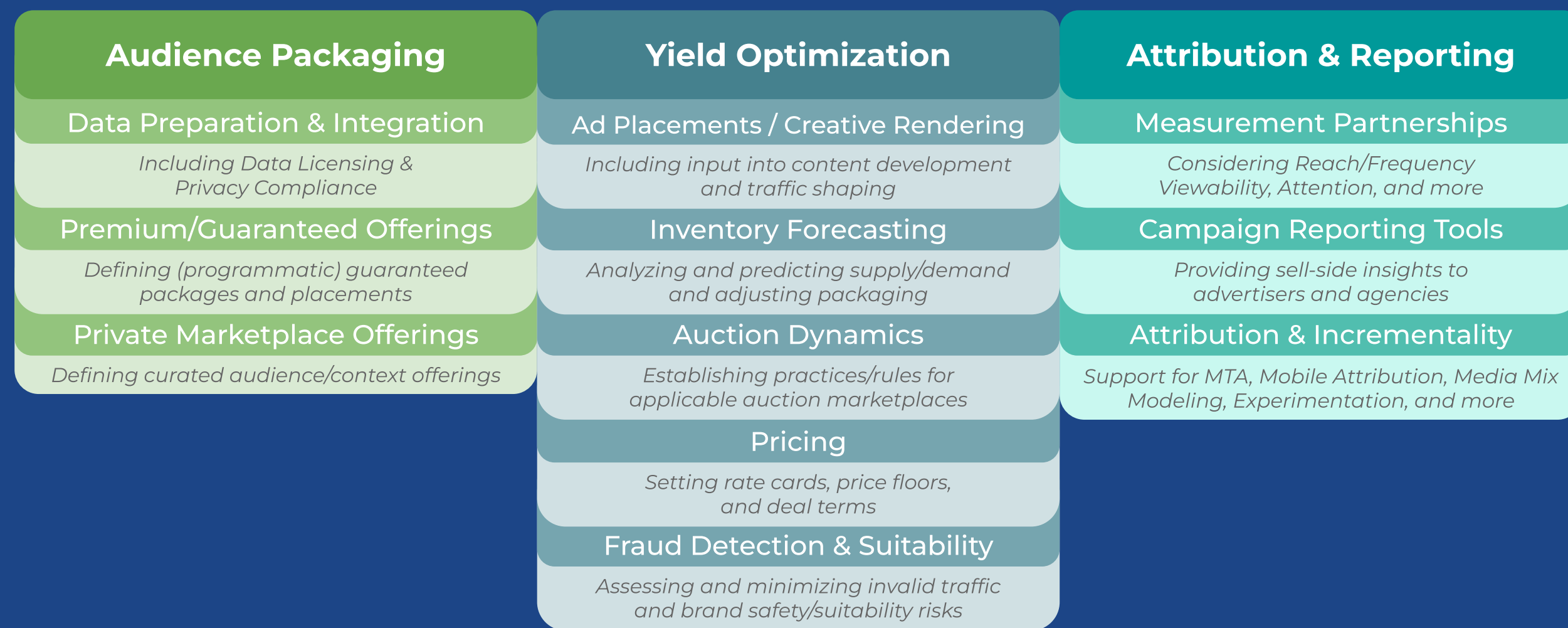
Understanding new technologies and offerings, determining a portfolio of appropriate solutions, and defining implementation plans for your business requires allocating valuable resources to stay informed and engaged about vendor products, industry standards, policy trends, and more. If you want to undertake a more complete assessment, ThinkMedium is well positioned to help.

Our framework's approach centers around an evaluation sequence starting from your overarching business strategy, connecting it to use cases and related assets, then evaluating platforms, technologies, solutions and partners that are most suitable to improve your revenue position.

Advertising Use Cases

The first phase establishes your business strategy and use cases, on which all future decisions should be based. Every publisher has a specific revenue model strategy for delivering a product or service to a specific set of customers to generate value. Articulating the customer and mechanism for your success is necessary for informing all future evaluations. Once you identify those use cases, you can use them as dependent variables to measure the “before” and “after” states of your business throughout the rest of the process.

There are a wide range of advertising use cases throughout the ecosystem. Each use case is impacted to a different degree by the shift towards new ID-less and ID-based solutions. Some use cases require minimal adjustments. Others may no longer be possible, requiring greater contingency planning. Being precise in what you do is as important as how you do it, as there are many ways to deliver on a specific objective.



Consider the following thought-starters:

What range of assumptions have you built into your FP&A models to account for signal loss?

Which use cases do you consider most at risk from declines in 3rd-party cookie and device-based advertising ID availability and the shift to ID-less solutions?

Which parts of ID-less approaches impact these use cases?

How will ID-less changes impact the delivery costs of each channel?

How may these changes vary by geography?

Do you have plans to adopt more contextual and/or curated audience ad offerings to counter targeting shifts resulting from ongoing declines in availability of 3rd-party cookies and other ad IDs?

Does this strategy fit the needs of the verticals you focus on?

How have you assessed the limits of new tech on video and/or native advertising, and how might your strategy be impacted in the short term by limitations of current implementations?

Do you have an understanding of the maturity curves of key new technologies involved?

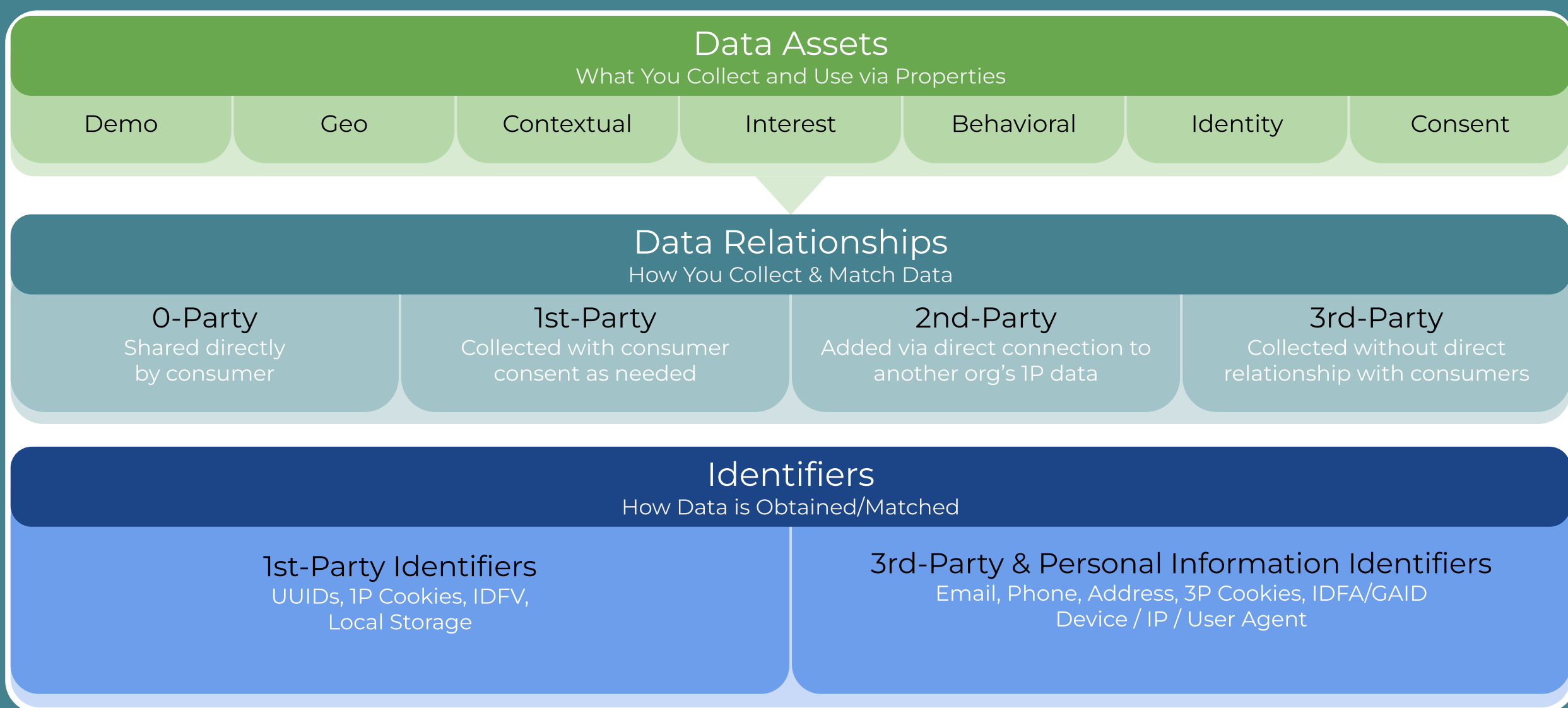
Do you have a reading of when short-term impacts may subside to inform your overall strategy and resource planning?

These areas/questions represent a subset of the full ThinkMedium Readiness Review for this phase, geared towards helping you understand and narrow down risks specific to your business.

Data Strategy/Assets

The second phase centers on understanding your data assets and how ID-less and ID-based technologies will alter their value to your use cases over the medium to long term. What is the architecture of your identity platform? What is the granularity of your data sets? How do identity and data attributes connect? How much of what you use is deterministic versus statistically inferred? Knowing what data you own, what data you use, and what data you plan to collect is critical to assessing your readiness.

Advertising use cases are generally operationalized via data. What data you as a publisher will and won't have access to will depend on your specific implementations and how they track against the latest platform policies, technology standards, and regulations. Completing this phase of the assessment will likely require collaboration from multiple departments, making it important to have participation from across your organization.



Consider the following thought-starters:

Given the current architecture of your identity platform:

Do you know how much you currently depend upon 3rd-party cookies and device-based advertising identifiers across relevant platforms?

Do you understand of how much 1st-party data and alternative identifiers (e.g. RampID, UID2) can compensate for the loss of legacy identifiers?

Have you defined how and in what timeframe the potential loss of other currently allowed identifiers (e.g., IP Address) could harm your business?

Have you evaluated which mitigation strategies would make the most sense for your business, prioritized by revenue area?

Do you have a clear sense of your 3rd-party data usage and corresponding risk profile, considering evolving regulatory and policy limitations?

Do you have visibility of any impact on 3rd-party sources that you are currently enriching your data with, if any?

Do you have a detailed understanding of mechanisms involved in creating and combining 3rd-party data with aggregate audiences from ID-less solutions?

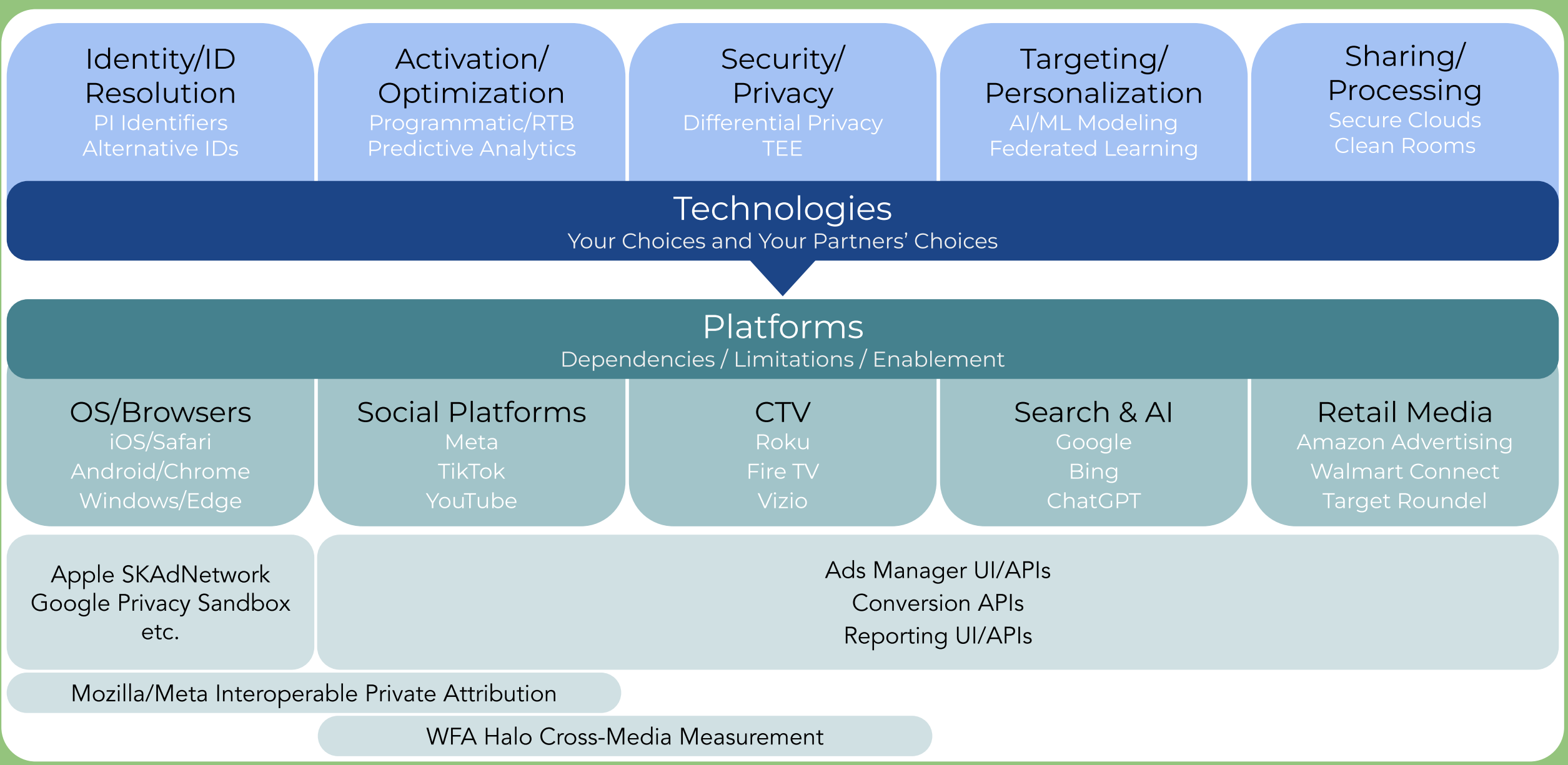
Have you measured the above's impact on your overall ability to understand and advertise effectively to your users?

These evaluation areas are a sample of our full Readiness Review, designed to uncover risks implied in building and deploying your current data assets, and the opportunities they may offer.

Platforms & Technologies

The third phase covers an analysis of platform and technology constraints. Changes to platforms and technologies may impact crucial qualities of the available data—like accuracy, data integrity, and scalability—posing risks to the use cases identified in the second phase. For example, retargeting can be achieved via Google Privacy Sandbox, but will it be as accurate, and will the mechanics allow for timely delivery of ads optimized for the cohort? If not, what is the predicted impact on efficacy and revenue? Complicating matters is the interaction between platforms and your specific technical choices. As an example, the attribution models underlying Chrome, Edge, Meta, and Safari are different. iOS attribution mechanics (in SKAdNetwork/AdAttributionKit) have been changing rapidly. With all of this change, how do you structure your attribution reporting mechanisms to get consistent reporting across channels in order to determine where to focus your business?

Browsers and operating systems are evolving today at a breakneck pace due to privacy and regulatory concerns. This makes a deep and current understanding of their architecture critical to evaluating readiness, especially where your in-house solutions might connect. This requires time and energy from your teams who may not have the bandwidth to stay atop these constantly shifting specifications.



Consider the following thought-starters:

What is your current understanding of platform and technology impacts across the full range of your delivery systems?

- Which browsers, browser technologies, and mobile technologies are driving the majority of your revenue?
- For each of these, are you aware of known changes that will impact your core tech and code base (e.g., to adapt to in-browser auctions in Chrome)?
- Do you understand how Sandbox, Google Ad Manager, and Prebid will work together?

Do you have an understanding of the interactions between ID-less technology and your machine learning platforms and algorithms?

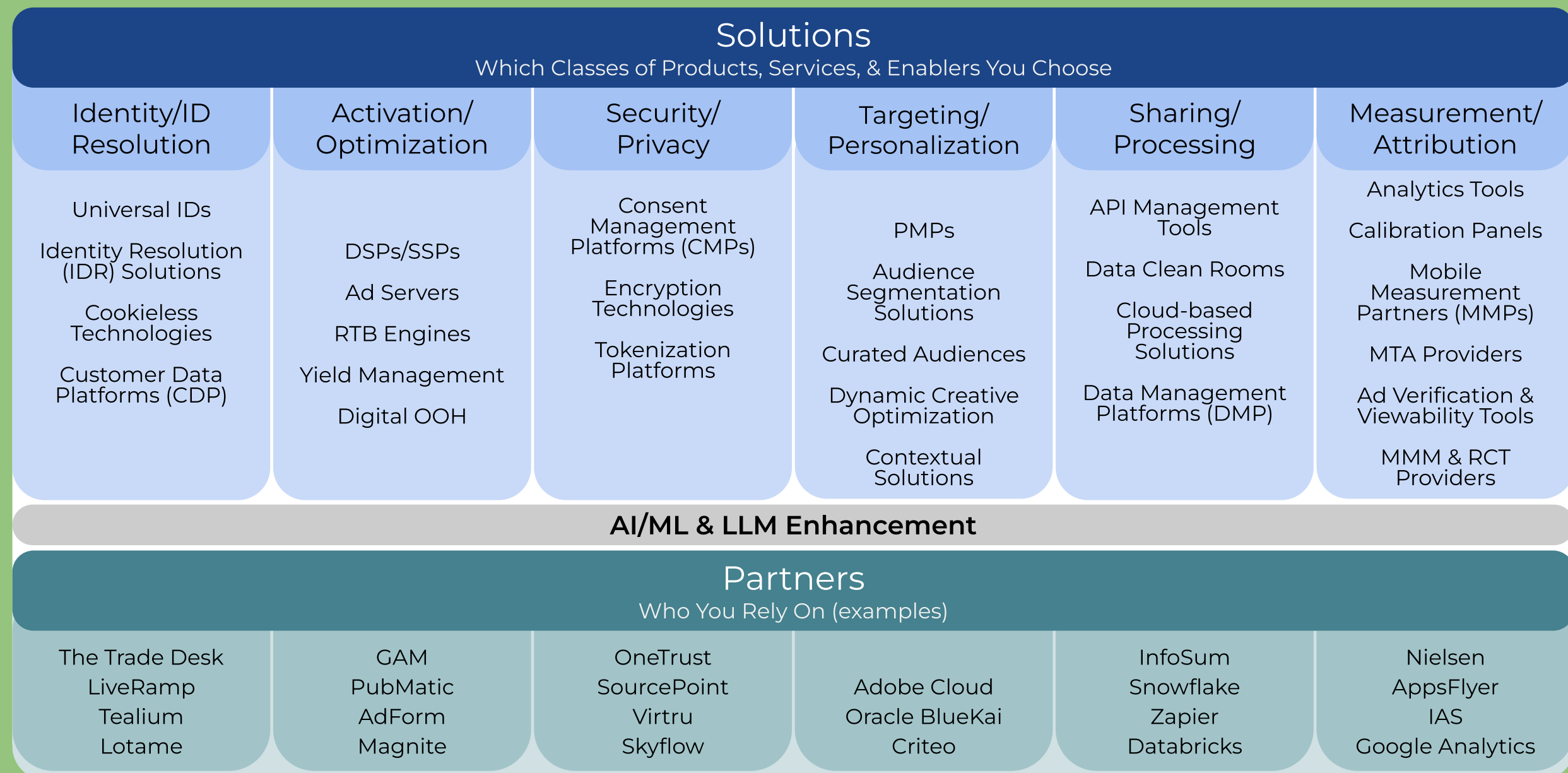
- Which critical input signals are you going to lose? Can they be replaced?
- Which specific algorithms will be most impacted and what are available remediation plans for each?
- Does your corporate strategy include plans to revamp machine learning algorithms, or finding new generative-AI technologies to augment or replace them so that your systems continue to perform at or above baseline?

Our full Readiness Review in this phase provides a robust understanding of platform and technology impacts, opportunities, and how your overall strategy should react to them.

Solutions & Partners

The fourth phase examines your current 3rd-party solutions and partners, new and emerging solutions available, and how they can help or hurt your readiness. Are your partners preparing to go ID-less? Are they employing any Privacy-Enhancing Technologies (PETs) that could be utilized to enhance the implementation of your use cases? Or are they employing durable ID-based solutions that you should consider in your implementation strategy and plans?

The magnitude of the changes can be daunting for any single organization. But your ad business depends on a series of complex, often highly customized integrations that require coordination across a continuously changing supply chain. By working with the right partners, you can maximize the return on your investments and maintain efficacy for your own use cases.



Consider the following thought-starters:

Do you have a read of the business and technical implications of ID-less solutions, regulatory changes, and platform changes on your systems and on downstream vendors?

Do you have insight into how each of your 3rd-party platform vendors is adapting to ID-less technology changes? On what time frame?

Do your partners' plans align with your updated architectural design and deployment strategies?

Are you aware of options to buy vs. build to re-enable selected capabilities?

Which partners are you currently considering adding to help mitigate or address impacts, if any, of the move to ID-less or newer ID-based solutions?

Are any of said partners providing machine learning and AI tools for predictive analytics? If yes, what percent of revenue will this cover?

How do you evaluate your partners' conformance to regulations and platform policies and ensure robust data security where data is exchanged?

How are you planning to share private audiences (e.g. within Google's Protected Audience API or curated/private marketplaces) with demand partners?

These questions represent a sample of the full evaluation, ultimately helping you better understand and refine your partner-related readiness plans.

Business & Organizational Impacts

The final phase takes all of this information and analyzes the potential impacts on performance and core functions of your business. Understanding the impact across your organization will help you determine the size of the investment, the amount of restructuring, the timeline for implementation, and the potential revenue and margin impacts.

Without having at least a directional assessment of impact, it is impossible to make tradeoffs and allocate resources for the evolving ecosystem. Additionally, these changes will impact teams across your organization and require them to collaborate to define and implement a plan. Before making significant investments or deciding to abstain from immediate action, grounding the conversation in tasks, timelines, risks, and opportunities can provide details needed to gain alignment from decision makers.

Consider the following thought-starters:

Are you currently foreseeing or planning any changes to your current pricing model in light of impacts outlined in previous phases?

What marketing changes are you planning in support of shifts in what your business can offer customers moving forward?

What changes to your billing processes are you planning to account for the impact and limitations of ID-less technologies on billing visibility and data sources?

Have you worked with your legal team and/or outside counsel to review your data retention policies in support of the privacy forward evolution?

Have you identified any 3rd-party data contract that needs to be updated or canceled in light of risk?

Do you have the right technical skills on staff given additions to and deletions from your technology stack? If not, do you have a contracting/hiring budget to remedy any gap?

This final step assesses overall impact to your business outcomes and your organization's ability to adapt to ongoing shifts.



Readiness Review Output

Information collected and organized from the five phases of the Readiness Review is then combined to give you an estimate of your readiness for each use case (prioritized) identified in the first phase. Each use case is scored for readiness regarding data strategy/assets, platforms and technologies, and solutions and partners. This gives you a tailored reading of business impact (relative revenue opportunity, cost, and organizational impacts).

Let's take a hypothetical US-based publisher in the Sports category with 50M monthly visitors:

- The publisher is leveraging Deal IDs in the bidding process as a tool to restructure deals based on ID-less vs. cookies, add control and precision over ad placements, and ensure the terms of their advertiser agreements are honored.
- The publisher has highly interactive properties and a sizable portion of their inventory is composed of in-stream video ads running alongside embedded video content, which may have limitations in Google Chrome.

Consider the following sample readiness report:

EXAMPLE

1. Auction Dynamics–Bidding using a Deal ID
2. Creative & Rendering–Render Video Ads Alongside Video Content

Below is an example of how these two use cases might score in terms of readiness:

Assessment, Considerations, Recommendations				
Advertising Use Case	Data Strategy/Assets	Platforms & Technologies	Solutions & Partners	Business Impact
Yield Optimization> Auction Dynamics	Ready	Somewhat Ready	Mostly Not Ready	Revenue/Cost Org Impacts
Yield Optimization> Creative Rendering	Ready	Not Ready	Somewhat Ready	Revenue/Cost Org Impacts

Yield Optimization > Auction Dynamics–Deal ID

This use case likely has a high readiness score for Data Strategy/Assets, as we imagine that:

- The publisher receives demographic, interest, geo, etc. data from the advertiser.
- The publisher can use their own 1st-party data to offer audience segments.
- Deal ID information, inventory details, and format to transmit are known.

However, this use case likely has a medium readiness score for Platforms & Technologies:

- Privacy regulations and platform policies may affect how targeting data is collected.
- Platform solutions like Privacy Sandbox do not have explicit mechanisms for Deal IDs.

Lastly, this use case likely has a medium readiness score for Solutions & Partners:

- Deal IDs will likely remain a robust solution for stipulating sales terms with advertisers.
- Platform and technology impacts covered above may affect some partner integrations.

Combining these scores, this use case may get affected by expected ecosystem changes, and there are some business impacts expected with the transition, such as a revenue opportunity from more Deal ID-enabled use cases, but also allocating resources to testing and securing this use case within Google Chrome Privacy Sandbox and/or other platform-driven solutions.

EXAMPLE

Yield Optimization > Creative Rendering– Video Ads with Video Content

Video ad rendering is likely to have a high readiness score for Data Strategy/Assets:

- The publisher likely has all assets, properties, and targeting requirements available.
- The publisher is responsible for and has control over ad parameters.

However, this use case has a low readiness score for Platforms & Technologies:

- Serving in-stream video ads would at present be directly affected by Google Chrome potentially requiring Fenced Frames for ad rendering in 2026.⁴
- Resolving this issue implies broader ecosystem alignment and future testing to ensure this use case continues functioning in Chrome.

Lastly, this use case has a medium readiness score for Solutions & Partners:

- The above concern also creates medium-term dependency to ensure the continued utility of any ad rendering solution and the partners that enable them.

Combining these scores, this use case may have significant cost implications, as it may require testing and possible retooling investments in a more ID-less ecosystem, including close monitoring of Google Chrome and Privacy Sandbox specs as they evolve, which may require more/dedicated staff.

These simplified examples demonstrate how you can use Readiness Review outputs to start future-proofing your business. For instance, you can look at the revenue generated from each targeting option and trade that off against the development costs needed to bring both use cases to parity in terms of readiness. Alternatively, you can make larger strategic decisions that realign your business focus and organizational structure to take advantage of the opportunities or protect against the threats to your business presented by ecosystem shifts.

Organizing the overwhelming amount of information and context pertaining to privacy and platform-related shifts into a single view at a high enough level to make effective decisions is key.

This is because the technical complexity and implementation nuances can make it nearly impossible to develop an accurate picture of the impact and tradeoffs. The ThinkMedium framework uses those as inputs but creates an output designed to enable action.

⁴ [The Privacy Sandbox | Sandbox News](#)

EXAMPLE

Now that you've seen how an Readiness Review can help prepare your organization for the changes that are coming, what should you do now? Below is a checklist to help get you started.

- Uncover any relevant existing plans and documentation your company has already completed.
- Identify and enlist a cross-functional team—Business Leadership, Product/Engineering, Partner Business Development, Legal/Policy, Operations, and others as needed.
- Understand the landscape of identity-related risk and opportunities caused by privacy-forward regulatory and platform shifts—and make plans to stay current on relevant changes.
- Outline and rank in priority order your advertising use cases and determine which of your data, technology, and partner assets and implementations are at medium/high risk.

For each at-risk implementation:

- Define its current revenue scope and develop a “business-as-usual” forward looking revenue/cost impact estimate as a baseline.
- Identify which alternative solutions, partners, and strategies can mitigate impacts, based on their utility and durability against your use cases.
- Define where predicted impacts may require broad changes to your current product, partner, and technology mix to protect revenue—and what those changes might cost.

Develop a roadmap for testing and implementation:

- Include selected solutions, partners, and technologies, including timelines, resourcing, and funding.
- Reconcile your roadmap timelines with relevant industry milestones and address gaps by shifting strategies or partners or adding resources where applicable.
- Develop a monitoring framework to keep track of how new/remedial solutions, partners, and technologies perform at mitigating impacts to your business.

Optimize your organization to address identified changes efficiently.

Next Steps – A Checklist

While doing the above discovery work, you may identify gaps in your planning. If you do, or if you just need to free your team to focus on their “day jobs”, consider a follow-on Readiness Review **self-assessment** or **direct engagement** with ThinkMedium’s team of experts, who are actively engaged with other leaders, developers, providers, and industry organizations.

About ThinkMedium

ThinkMedium (www.thinkmedium.tech) supports advertising and media companies of all sizes with advisory services that help them shift strategies, plans, and practices to address key market forces and drivers of a healthy ecosystem: privacy, brand and consumer safety, and business and ecological efficiency.

We provide and deliver data strategies, measurement solution plans, advertising business strategies and plans, industry insights and influence, and other services.

Founded by industry veteran, Dennis Buchheim, ThinkMedium assembles a team of relevant industry experts to meet the critical and bespoke needs of each client.

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To learn more email:
info@thinkmedium.tech

