

**NDA** FORESIGHT  
FOCUS  
*INSIGHT REPORT*

# SUSTAINABILITY & BRAND SAFETY

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**New Digital Age (NDA) would like to thank the industry experts who participated in our Foresight Focus sessions on Sustainability and Brand Safety:**

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SVP EMEA,  
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**Special thanks also to our event sponsors, Greenbids, Magnite, YouTube and Zefr.**

# \_INTRODUCING FORESIGHT FOCUS

At NDA, we're constantly looking for new ways to support our core audiences of agencies, brands, publishers and ad tech providers. Our readers told us that they want to stay up-to-date on the hottest talking points of the digital marketing landscape, but that they lack the time to do so.

In response, we created Foresight Focus, a new series of events that seeks to bring clarity to the most important industry issues of the moment. Each Foresight Focus session is designed to provide insights from two expert keynote speakers, followed by a deeper dive industry panel discussion and audience Q&A, all wrapped up within 90 minutes.

The first of these half-day events was staged in London during December 2023 and included two sessions, addressing the topics of **Sustainability** and **Brand Safety**.

For example, how can agencies, advertisers and media owners work to reduce their impact on the world while still meeting their

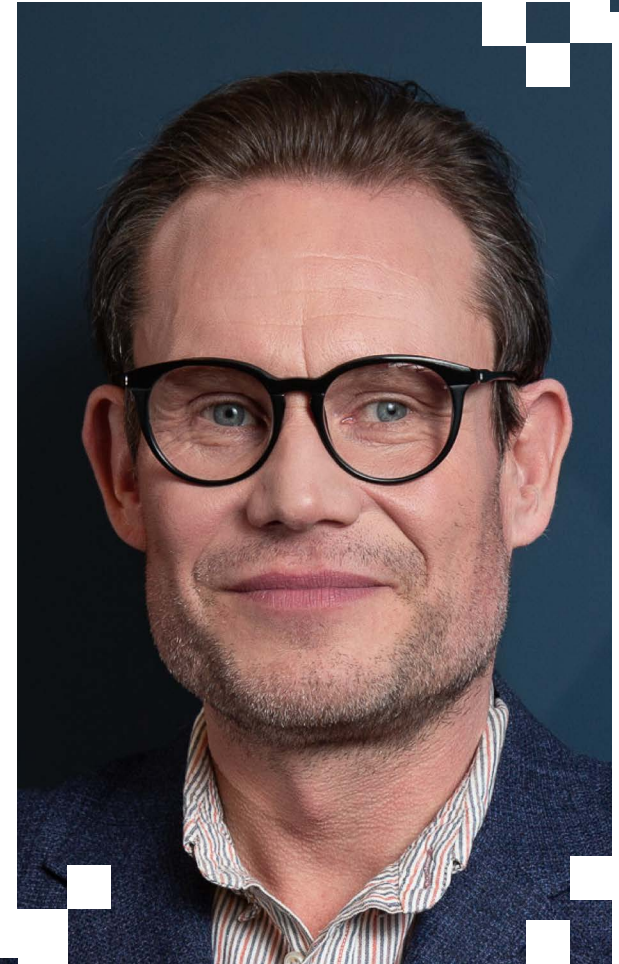
own goals? What does a truly sustainable and successful campaign look like? How can brand advertisers develop a brand safety media strategy fit for 2024?

This report summarises the insights from the keynote speeches and panel discussion on the day, including contributions from brands such as Monzo Bank and Ben & Jerry's, agencies including Publicis Media and Bountiful Cow, tech players such as YouTube, Magnite, Zefr and Greenbids, and industry bodies ISBA and the Advertising Association.

The result is a rounded perspective on two of the industry's most pressing issues. We hope you find the content illuminating and enjoyable to read.

Keep reading [www.NewDigitalAge.co.uk](http://www.NewDigitalAge.co.uk) for details of our 2024 Focus Foresight events.

**Justin Pearce,**  
Editor,  
New Digital Age





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**— SUSTAINABILITY**

# REDEFINING ADVERTISING IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Once upon a time, the advertising industry used its talents to create the super cool figure of the Marlboro Man, helping to sell billions of cigarettes in the process. In his opening keynote for the Foresight Focus on Sustainability, Matt Bourn, Director of Communications for the Advertising Association & Ad Net Zero, argued that the ad industry must not repeat the mistakes of the past in relation to how it responds to the climate emergency.

“My job is essentially to help manage the reputation of the UK ad industry,” said Bourn. “In that sense, climate change has the potential to be tobacco times 100. Every part of our economy is based on consumption of products and services, and advertising is used to support that consumption. I believe we’re at a really critical moment for what advertising actually means in the 21st century.

“The definitions and behaviours defined in the 20th century don’t stack up anymore in 2024. We can’t just help to sell the next shiny thing as usual. We need to ask ourselves if this new product or service is helping to make things better or worse for our planet.”

As well as re-examining the things they are promoting, the ad industry also needs to address the way they are promoting it. As it stands, the digital ad ecosystem is estimated to be responsible for around 3.5% of the global carbon emissions that are driving climate change.

Bourn explained: “Every time we serve an ad, we help warm the planet a little bit. What’s more, every little transaction that we’re making on the way to serve that ad warms the planet a little bit more. We need to start accounting for that.

“The aim of the game is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that essentially means two things. Firstly, we’ve got to change the way we work to be accountable for the carbon emissions involved. Secondly, we’ve got to change the work we make, so that we are confident we are promoting things which are better for the global environment.”



# \_ZERO TO HERO?

In late 2020, the Advertising Association (AA), in partnership with the IPA and ISBA, launched Ad Net Zero, an industry-wide initiative to help UK advertising respond to the climate crisis caused by CO2 emissions. Ad Net Zero's mission is for immediate, collective industry action to help achieve real net zero carbon emissions from the development, production and media placement of advertising.

Bourn commented: "At the core of Ad Net Zero is a fundamental belief that we need to get the industry aligned with science based targets. We need every single business in the industry, large or small, to set and report against those science based targets.

"Interestingly, brands are way ahead of the pack on this, when compared to agencies and ad tech companies. There's no reason why 100% of ad tech companies can't have a science based target in place. It's very straightforward and it will focus your business on driving emissions down across your supply chain."

Bourn also highlighted various external factors prompting businesses to reduce their impact on climate change. These range from increased environmental regulation around the world, to the shifting sentiments of both investors and consumers, who now prefer to back brands making a positive contribution to society. The same is true for the next generation of talent needed to power your business, who are opting to work with brands that are making a positive difference to climate change.

Bourn concluded: "These are the arguments you need to be having right now at board level. I promise you that if your business is not engaging properly with the issue of sustainability, by the end of this decade, your business will not exist."

Sustainable Advertising - how advertising can support a better future, by Matt Bourn and Sebastian Munden, is published in March by Kogan Page.



# GREEN IS THE NEW GOLD: WHY ADTECH IS FOCUSING ON A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

According to figures from Scope3, the programmatic advertising ecosystem is responsible for generating 2.6 million tonnes of carbon emissions every year. The real scandal, however, according to Jean-Baptiste Pettit, CTO and co-founder of Greenbids, is the inefficiency associated with those emissions.

“The amount of waste generated by the programmatic chain is huge,” said Pettit. “Depending on how you calculate it, anything between 40% to 90% of the carbon emitted doesn’t serve any purpose for an advertiser.”

Pettit asked the Foresight Focus audience to imagine a romantic couple sharing a bowl of spaghetti, in the hope of re-enacting the famous ‘spaghetti kiss’ scene from Disney’s ‘Lady and the Tramp’. If the couple’s goal is romance and anticipation, the full bowl of spaghetti is relevant, however, if the end goal is the kiss itself, only one strand of spaghetti is actually needed.

“The programmatic ad chain is massively over-engineered simply because it was born at a time when ‘sustainability’ wasn’t an issue on anyone’s radar. The prevailing thought back then was that everything in the ecosystem should be connected, resulting in there being literally thousands of different ways to buy the same inventory. As it stands, ad selection and bidding are responsible for generating around 60% of a campaign’s carbon emissions,” explained Pettit.



# \_TECH TALK

In recent years, the mindset of the marketplace has shifted to put more of a focus on efficiency and the value of each micro-transaction taking place in the programmatic chain. As a result, the market for 'sustainable' advertising solutions is growing fast, representing both an opportunity and a problem for advertisers, according to Pettit.

"Many of those new 'solutions' will be little more than greenwashing, offering no real value. From an advertiser perspective, the marketplace is a difficult place to navigate right now."

So, how can an advertiser know for sure that they are signing with a company that has a genuine solution, rather than a greenwashing company?

Pettit said: "It's difficult, but one thing to keep in mind is that the problem with the programmatic chain is essentially a technical issue, so any solution you are looking at adopting should be primarily a technical solution. If you get the sense that a proposed solution is more marketing-focused than tech-focused, it's probably greenwashing."

Pettit believes that all organisations across the programmatic advertising chain should be focusing on sustainability for a number of compelling reasons. In the first instance, carbon reduction correlates with campaign performance and efficiency,

i.e. reducing waste typically means reducing things like non-viewable impressions. Another reason, suggests Pettit, is that compared to other industries, carbon reduction is a relatively easy thing for the adtech sector to do.

"In a way, we're lucky to work in an industry that has been so over-engineered and inefficient in the past, making it possible for us to massively reduce our carbon footprint. Decarbonising ad tech is the 'low hanging fruit' of carbon reduction. We have a duty to lead by example.

"Let's do it," said Pettit.





# SUSTAINABILITY ON THE AGENDA: “WE ARE NOT ALONE”

In final section of the Foresight Focus session on Sustainability, NDA’s editor Justin Pearse chaired a panel discussion, where he was joined by: Sara Patel, Director, Partnerships & Digital Standards, Publicis Media; Kerry Thorpe, Communications Director, Ben & Jerry’s; Jean-Baptiste Pettit, CTO & Co-founder, Greenbids; Julie Selman, SVP Head of EMEA, Magnite; and Fiona Salmon, Global VP of Partnerships & Sustainability Lead, at search intelligence platform Captify.

Salmon told the audience that the ‘Sustainability Lead’ element of her job takes up around 30% of her time and that, until recently, she sometimes felt isolated in promoting a sustainability focus agenda.

She said: “I don’t feel so alone this year, and certainly not so alone in the industry. There are more and more events like this, for example, and brands are starting to push down through the supply chain, asking questions of agencies and tech suppliers through RFIs. Just recently a new client came to us with specific T&Cs relating to sustainability and I rejoiced, because we were already in great shape to meet those.”

Salmon believes that the adtech community needs to take more responsibility and measure its environmental impact: “We’ve been working with a carbon accounting platform,

Cedara, for nearly two years and we’ve observed that most of our carbon burning is in the inventory supply chain. We were already doing things like SPO (Supply Path Optimisation) clean-ups and clearing out MFAs (Made for Advertising sites) from a performance standpoint, but now we’re looking at things again from a sustainability perspective.”



# \_THE POWER OF ONE

Pettit shared that he feels optimistic about the prospects of meaningful change within businesses, but warned that those looking to reduce their carbon emissions need to keep a close eye on the details: “The first thing you should consider when looking at any carbon report is what unit is being measured? Is it tonnes of carbon in terms of carbon per impression? Is it tonnes of carbon per viewable impression, or per click, or something else?”

“And how do those measurements relate to the performance of your campaign? You could have a very low carbon per impression, for instance, but if you have 10% viewability, the carbon per viewable impression is going to be ugly.”

Pettit added: “Everyone is starting to realise the reality of climate change. I know from experience that one person can drive change within a global organisation and have a huge impact. That makes me hopeful for the future.” Julie Selman was that ‘one person’ for independent supply-side platform Magnite. She told the audience: “Around three years ago, I did a part-time course in Sustainability as a personal interest. However, when sustainability became a big industry talking point, I knew I had the opportunity to drive things forward using the knowledge I had gained from my course. About 18 months ago, we started having sustainability conversations with agencies at a high level. Since then we’ve seen a steady increase in Requests for Information (RFIs) and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from brands and agencies that include a focus on sustainability, looking for details about our supply chain and the various partners we work with.”



# \_GENUINE IMPACT

Offering an agency perspective on sustainability issues, Publicis Media's Patel said: "The most common questions I get asked when I'm presenting on sustainability in client workshops are things like 'What does good look like?' What numbers are important? What targets or benchmarks are we trying to hit? It's really important that we all collaborate and share as much information as possible, because we need consistent standards across sectors and industries."

"Greenwashing is still a big issue. What's already clear is that consumers will look a lot less favourably on brands if they're greenwashing and that will impact on purchasing behaviour and consumer alignment with the brand. Clients and agencies alike, we all want to move faster on this, but we're afraid of sometimes getting it wrong. However, if you approach sustainability with the right mindset and do as much investigation into what you're doing as possible, hopefully, your purpose will shine through to your customers."

Thorpe agreed, pointing out that millions of customers worldwide return to Ben and Jerry's again and again "because they see their values mirrored in the values we hold as a company".

She commented: "So many sustainability campaigns go wrong because somebody in a room somewhere says, "We need to be seen to be green" or "How can we make people love us more

for being green?" The aim of those campaigns is always, first and foremost, to drive brand equity rather than to deliver any meaningful change. The questions they should be asking instead are what positive impact can we make on the world? How can we best measure the impact that we're making? How can we be honest about our progress and reflect on that?"

The audience of industry professionals were left in no doubt that, in 2024, rather than being lone wolves howling at the moon, champions of sustainability have become absolutely crucial to the future of their organisations.





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# \_MORE CARROT, LESS STICK: GET READY FOR BRAND SAFETY 2.0

Dan Larden is Head of Media at ISBA (the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers), the only trade body in the UK that represents brand owners and advertisers specifically. He was also the first keynote speaker on the subject of Brand Safety at the recent Foresight Focus event.

“Many of the largest brands in the UK contribute funds to ISBA to help move the industry forward,” explained Larden. “That includes making the industry more transparent, responsible and accountable. One of the areas where we can see a definite progression in recent years is around the concept of ‘brand safety’.

“From a digital marketing perspective, brand safety became part of the conversation around 2015, with agencies and brands focusing on the basics, i.e. how do you define brand safety? What represents a good ad placement versus a bad one? What sort of agreements can be struck between clients, agencies and platforms around brand safety? The focus was primarily around ensuring brands could buy good quality inventory from respected media.”

Next, around 2018, came the era of ‘brand suitability’ where focus shifted to brands actively blocking placements that might prove controversial. This, said Larden, led to a few years where agencies and advertisers used keyword blocking “a bit too aggressively”.

For example, blocking words such as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ (in a well-meaning effort to avoid appearing next to homophobic content) had the unintended consequence that minority media were often excluded from media plans.

Larden provided a further example of keyword confusion: “In 2020, we saw our programmatic ad spend drop dramatically against all news. After a lot of investigation, we discovered that one of the verification platforms we were using for pre-bid blocking had categorised Coronavirus as a ‘natural disaster’ and we had a filter in place to avoid such content!”



# \_REWARDS FOR GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Larden believes the digital marketing industry is entering a new era of social responsibility, where a brand's media strategy will look to reward the media outlets that align with their values, rather than simply filtering out those that do not. He pointed to the "amazing work" of the Global Alliance for Responsible Media (GARM), a cross-industry initiative established by the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA), to help make the age of 'Brand Safety 2.0' a reality.

He said: "It's difficult to tackle harmful online content if you are unable to describe it using consistent and understandable language. GARM has developed common definitions to ensure that the advertising industry is categorising harmful content in the same way across the board, creating an essential foundation to stop that kind of content being monetised through advertising.

"Brand Safety 2.0 is going to be more about ethics, values, purpose and, crucially, rewarding good practice among publishers. This will require closer conversations between media owners and brands, and I think we're already starting to see that happen, specifically in the programmatic ecosystem."

Larden added: "The growth of Retail Media is a great example of that, where we're seeing premium advertisers taking time to really understand exactly what inventory they're buying, and the retail media networks are following up with better controls and transparent buying options."



# \_GOOGLE & YOUTUBE'S VISION FOR BRAND-SAFE ADVERTISING

Last year's Oxford economic report valued the YouTube creative economy in the EU and the UK at around 5.5 billion Euros (and £2 billion in the UK alone) supporting more than 150,000 full-time jobs.

In her role as Managing Director Partners & Specialists, UKI, for Google, Dyana Najdi works closely with advertisers and industry partners to ensure they are getting the best results from their media investments from Google solutions, including YouTube. Prior to her current role, Najdi spent a decade working on YouTube Strategy including brand safety, making her an ideal keynote speaker on the evolution of the topic.

"Around 500 hours of content is uploaded every single minute to YouTube," Najdi told the audience. "There's a tension that exists between maintaining an open platform and upholding our duty of care to ensure that we are protecting that delicate ecosystem of advertisers, users and creators. We take this responsibility incredibly seriously.

"It has been a journey, a long one, but we've made a lot of progress as a platform based on the feedback we've received. That openness and exchange of ideas is critical to what YouTube represents today, allowing creators to find audiences and foster communities all around the world."

Najdi told how YouTube has introduced a range of new features and "incredibly robust safeguards" to ensure that advertisers are able to have a controlled and safe brand experience online, while users have access to reliable, trustworthy information, and creators maintain their freedom of expression.

"For example, we recognise our responsibility to help users differentiate between synthetic and real content. We've updated our policies so that creators are required to signal when they're uploading any content that has been created entirely or partially created by AI."



# \_NEW CHOICES

Turning to the most recent improvements made for advertisers, Najdi said: “We recently launched our Content Suitability Centre within our ads interface, which builds on existing YouTube and the Google Display Network controls and makes it simpler and more consistent to set up and manage your media effectively.

“At the heart of the Content Suitability Centre are three inventory modes to help advertisers to navigate their tolerance and risk appetite across all monetisable inventory. All the inventory that exists there adheres to our community guidelines and monetisation policy, however, we recognise there are sensitive categories, such as profanity or a degree of sexual content, where advertisers may want extra control around how they're surfacing.”

YouTube has also recently introduced an Estimated Impact tool that allows advertisers to test the impact on both the reach and cost of making particular selections or restrictions within the Content Suitability Centre. In addition, a new Excluded Themes control has been created, allowing advertisers to manage controls around sensitive topics at the account level, rather than on a campaign-by-campaign basis.

“We work hard to be innovative and proactive, often taking action long before the industry or any form of regulation compels us to. However, it's important that the industry continues to put pressure on platforms like ours. That pressure ensures that we're innovating at the same pace as the world around us,” said Najdi. “In many ways, YouTube is a reflection of the world around us. We're continuously evolving the platform, evolving our policies, guidelines and controls, to make sure that we remain in step with how people are creating and consuming content.





# \_A SUITABLE FUTURE FOR BRAND ADVERTISERS?

To round off the Foresight Focus session on Brand Safety issues, NDA editor Justin Pearse hosted a panel discussion, where he was joined by Adam Foley, CEO, Bountiful Cow; Rebecca MacDonald, Brand Safety & Responsibility Lead, YouTube; Emma Lacey, SVP EMEA, Zefr; and Vittorio Boccanera, Senior Growth Manager, Monzo Bank.

Boccanera told of how brand safety has become increasingly important to the challenger banking brand. He said: “We’ve grown really organically so our reputation is something we want to safeguard. Until about a year and a half ago, the modest reach on our live channels didn’t require us to think about where our ads were served as a top priority – we were still in a small-scale testing phase. However, as we started to scale channels extensively, and dip our toes more into programmatic and emerging channels like CTV and podcast marketing, thinking about brand safety became super important for us.

“We’ve noticed that if you don’t have the right suitability measures and brand safety measures in place, there are players out there who will happily take advantage of you. The amount of ad fraud that you’re susceptible to as a brand is quite high. In terms of CTV, we are now considering the context of where our ads are shown, but being able to monitor that and have the right safeguard metrics in place is still quite difficult.”



# \_UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Foley argued that the root cause of most brand safety issues is the fact that many digital advertising formats aren't effective enough.

He said: "0.01% is considered a 'successful' click through rate for some formats, meaning you've got to buy millions of placements to add up to anything significant. That leads you into the position where you advertise on sites you don't know. When you then start to add on brand safety technology things get even trickier for advertisers and publishers. An example of that would be articles about racism being incorrectly blocked as 'racist' content. It's easy to start penalising the wrong people."

Foley also warned against the dangers of brands and agencies being the people who decide what a pluralistic media should look like: "Increasingly, in digital media, the responsibility for paying for content has been abdicated by consumers to advertisers. In a world where advertising funds more and more content, an unwanted moral responsibility has landed on the shoulders of people who probably aren't best equipped to make the decision, i.e. us!

"There are regulators in place to deal with this stuff, right? I might personally deeply disagree with the MailOnline's content, but does that mean that I shouldn't advertise there?"

Returning to the unintended consequences of brand safety block-lists, MacDonald commented: "One of the most excluded

categories of content on YouTube is Hip-Hop, despite the fact that it's hugely popular with audiences. What is the intent behind that exclusion? And how can we use new technologies like AI to provide better safety and suitability tools? The advancements we're seeing are enabling a move away from 'blanket block' approaches to suitability towards an approach that better captures the nuances of a particular strategy. The scale of content that we're dealing with now means that we should work with both human review and AI technology to assess the suitability of placements."



# \_AI TO THE RESCUE?

Lacey expanded on the ways the AI might create both new problems and new solutions for brand marketers. She said: “Thanks to social media, the barrier to entry for creating online content has reduced dramatically. In addition, generative AI has made it possible for anyone to create vast quantities of content at the click of a button. That combination means that assessing the level of brand risk associated with online content in real-time has become more important than ever.

“You need to make sure you're working with the right partners. The big platforms are doing a great job of filtering and partnering with quality creators, but it's important to have third-party verification to make sure that nothing slips through the net. Content can be 'brand safe' but not necessarily in line with your preferences.”

Lacey added: “The good news is that the big platforms are all leaning into these problems and looking at how AI can be used in combination with human expertise to make things better. Generally speaking, I feel more positive about the direction of the industry at the moment than ever before.”



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