

# Above the Fold: Q1 2026 Report

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The first quarter of 2026 made one thing very clear: the business side of publishing is being forced to operate in several realities at once.

Teams are dealing with immediate revenue pressure, unstable traffic patterns, shifting buyer behavior, AI-fueled disruption, and growing demands on already strained operations. That tension is shaping decisions everywhere; in yield strategy, in staffing, in workflows, in audience development, and in the ongoing question of where publishers can still build durable leverage.

What comes through in this report is how much the conversation has sharpened. Publishers are asking harder questions, getting more specific about what is and is not working, and spending less time on abstractions that do not translate into revenue, efficiency, or control.

There is a stronger pull toward owned audience relationships, cleaner systems, more useful automation, and metrics that reflect actual business health rather than surface-level performance. The tone across the community is practical, impatient, and increasingly clear-eyed about what this moment requires.

This report reflects that shift. It brings together the concerns, patterns, and operational signals that kept surfacing across the quarter as an active-command manual for the people making revenue, operations, audience, and product decisions in real time.

The goal here is to help industry stakeholders inside the business side of publishing to get more precise about where they are under pressure, where they still have room to move, and where sharper action matters most now.

# Navigating VUCA: Redefining Publisher Strategies

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

The publishing and ad operations industry is operating in a "VUCA" environment, which is defined by **volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity** (thank you to Opti Digital for the term). Traditional traffic models are deteriorating due to AI-driven zero-click search and aggressive web scrapers.

Consequently, reach is now viewed as "borrowed," forcing a massive structural pivot toward "owned" attention. While existential macro threats loom large, publishers' immediate demand is for **"revenue now,"** pushing teams to squeeze more value from existing sessions rather than chasing lost traffic.

Meanwhile, ad operations is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Teams are moving away from manual, repetitive tasks toward systemic automation and **"vibe coding"**.

The overarching sentiment is a mix of exhaustion from "hero culture" and cautious optimism about redesigning workflows, with a clear consensus that publishers must take aggressive ownership of their destinies.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY IS SAYING

Behind closed doors, the community's tone balances frustration with fierce resilience.

There is profound irritation over asymmetric industry standards—like the [MRC's ad auction rules](#)—that publishers feel disproportionately burden the sell-side while giving buyers and walled gardens a pass.

Operators are also acutely aware of a retention crisis driven by burnout, actively calling out **"hero culture" as a fragile systems design failure** rather than a badge of honor. Yet, there's an exhilarating energy around redefining ad ops.

Professionals are evolving into amateur engineers via AI tools and rallying around a "concede nothing" mindset.

Ultimately, publishers are tired of hearing about "managed decline" and are fiercely advocating for "**ruthless independence**," demanding strategic seats at the table and shifting their focus to concrete, immediate tactical wins.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Write down your formal escalation policy to eliminate fragile "hero culture" and single points of failure.
2. **Publishers:** Shift your primary optimization target from CPM and sheer traffic volume to Revenue Per Session (RPS) or Revenue Per Visitor (RPV) to maximize the value of current audiences.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit your ad tech stack to simplify operations, reduce latency, and minimize unnecessary partners that add complexity without bringing incremental revenue.
4. **Publishers:** Treat your direct audience as your primary asset; prioritize strategies that build owned attention, such as authenticated users and newsletters, over rented search or social traffic.
5. **Industry:** Demand bidirectional transparency in ad auctions, pushing back against standards that heavily burden the sell-side without holding buyers and walled gardens accountable.
6. **Ad Operations Management:** Start "vibe coding"—invest in upskilling teams to use AI and automation tools (like Claude or n8n) to eliminate repetitive tasks and strategically redesign workflows.

# CPM Revenue Trends

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

The start of 2026 revealed a challenging landscape for open auction CPMs, with benchmarking data showing both display and video CPMs decreasing month-over-month and year-over-year in January.

While February saw a slight recovery with month-over-month increases, overall market sentiment points to a soft quarter for CPMs. Mobile Android CPMs took significant double-digit drops recently, and Amazon TAM has experienced dramatic spend and eCPM drops due to endpoint changes and infrastructure upgrades.

However, the decline isn't universal; publishers who recently integrated robust first-party data and identity graphs are actively bucking the trend, reporting banner CPM increases of 8% on desktop and 16% on mobile.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY IS SAYING

Behind the scenes, publishers are realizing that obsessing over top-line open market CPMs is a trap. Teams reporting "healthy" CPMs are often leaving massive money on the table in cookieless browsers like Safari and Firefox, where proper identity management can increase CPMs exponentially.

There is also growing concern around supply path optimization; for instance, while The Trade Desk's OpenPath drives high spend, publishers note it often yields the lowest CPMs. Because of these shifting dynamics, many in the community are actively moving away from CPM as the ultimate metric.

Instead, operators are pushing to evaluate success based on Revenue Per Session (RPS) or Revenue Per Visitor (RPV) to account for total engagement rather than single-impression fluctuations.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Shift your primary optimization target from CPM to Revenue Per Visitor (RPV) or Revenue Per Session (RPS) to better reflect total audience value.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Actively manage identity coverage for Safari and Firefox, which make up ~50% of sessions and offer massive CPM upside when authenticated.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Test reducing ad density (e.g., cutting units from 14 to 7); counterintuitively, fewer ads can drive higher individual CPMs, better viewability, and more total revenue.
4. **Publishers:** Use monthly benchmark reports to distinguish between your own stack's technical issues and macro seasonal CPM softening.
5. **Ad Operations Management:** Monitor Amazon TAM/APS performance daily, as recent unannounced endpoint changes and infrastructure upgrades have caused severe weekend spend and CPM drops.
6. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit SSP take-rates by comparing the spend DSPs report against the revenue you actually receive, as hidden fees drag down net CPMs.
7. **Industry:** Stop using bid shading and hidden fees disguised as "direct paths" that artificially depress publisher CPMs while claiming to optimize the supply chain.
8. **Publishers:** Implement dynamic price flooring to combat bid shading and recover lost monetization efficiency below the topline.

# The "Middle is Eroding": Quality vs. Made-for-Advertising (MFA)

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

The digital advertising landscape is polarizing, effectively eroding the "middle" tier of publishers.

On one end, buyers are shifting toward strict inclusion lists built around highly trusted, premium publisher portfolios. On the other end, bad actors are aggressively spoofing news domains with AI-generated content to siphon off ad revenue, creating a flood of deceptive Made-for-Advertising (MFA) sites.

While this polarization has helped eliminate the lowest-quality MFA supply from trusted programmatic marketplaces, it has created a brutal environment for mid-sized publishers. Because buyers are making deliberate "portfolio choices" to avoid risk, high-quality but subscale publishers are simply being ignored.

Furthermore, major demand sources like Amazon are aggressively pruning accounts they classify as MFA or User-Generated Content (UGC), often using flawed definitions that catch legitimate publishers in the crossfire.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY IS SAYING

The community recognizes that the fight against MFA and AI-spoofed sites is permanently altering buyer behavior, but operators are deeply frustrated by the collateral damage.

Trust and awareness are now primary economic levers, meaning technical excellence alone is no longer enough to win programmatic spend. Operators note that agencies are favoring ease and safety over broad reach, resulting in massive concentration of spend among top-tier publishers and SSPs.

For independent publishers, the barrier to entry is rising. The community is actively debating whether subscale publishers have the resources to justify the fixed costs of trust-building independently, or if they must align with larger portfolios to remain visible to buyers.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Evaluate whether your current scale justifies independent trust-building efforts, or if you need to align with a larger portfolio or curated SSP deal package to ensure buyers do not ignore your inventory.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Closely monitor demand partners (like Amazon APS) for sudden spend drops or account pruning, as their aggressive anti-MFA and anti-UGC initiatives may incorrectly flag your legitimate inventory.
3. **Industry:** Move away from blunt, automated definitions of MFA and UGC that unfairly demonetize legitimate mid-tier publishers, and adopt more nuanced evaluations to protect the open web.
4. **Publishers:** Actively differentiate your inventory from AI-spoofed sites by engaging in industry transparency initiatives to ensure you are placed on buyer inclusion lists.

# The "Revenue Now" Mandate: Balancing Immediate Wins with Sustainable Growth

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

Publishers are facing intense pressure to replace declining organic traffic with immediate, short-term revenue, sparking a "revenue now" mandate. Instead of relying solely on long-term macro strategies, teams are hunting for unturned stones to quickly boost yield without overhauling their entire infrastructure.

This involves deploying tools that deliver immediate ROI, such as in-view ad refreshing, dynamic e-commerce integrations, and push notification re-engagement to maximize the value of current site visitors.

At the same time, the industry recognizes that traffic alone is no longer a viable safety net. While securing quick programmatic wins, publishers must also build their "next river" of sustainable income by diversifying into off-platform revenue, audience extension, and treating their first-party data as a renewable asset.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY IS SAYING

Behind closed doors, operators are frustrated by the constant shifting of KPIs – from programmatic yield to subscriptions, and now to immediate top-line revenue. There is a palpable urgency to find solutions that do not require heavy developer resources or massive site overhauls.

The community is actively crowdsourcing "RevenueScape" lists to categorize immediate revenue drivers like exit-intent monetization, ad block recovery, and rich media units.

However, operators caution that simply stuffing more ads onto a page dilutes overall value and harms the user experience. Instead, the consensus is shifting toward "Revenue Per Session" (RPS) as the ultimate north star.

By focusing on increasing session length and deep engagement, publishers can squeeze more value from existing traffic while systematically investing in owned channels to weather search volatility.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Run an immediate revenue audit by reviewing SSP invoices line by line to identify hidden take-rates and recapture missing margins.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Implement full-stack ad block recovery and payer consent models to immediately reclaim lost revenue from unmonetized traffic without needing heavy development work.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Deploy smart refresh technology that only triggers when viewability and CPM uplift guarantees are met, squeezing more revenue out of existing sessions without hurting the user experience.
4. **Publishers:** Diversify beyond on-site impressions by utilizing "Audience Extension" to monetize your first-party data and reach your audience off-platform.
5. **Ad Operations Management:** Evaluate and integrate tools for exit-intent monetization, push notifications, and dynamic e-commerce units to instantly extend session length and drive incremental yield.
6. **Publishers:** Manage off-platform revenue (like AI text-to-video and social media syndication) as a standalone P&L rather than treating it as a mere add-on to owned-and-operated properties.
7. **Ad Operations Management:** Bridge the gap between engineering and ad ops by identifying if your developer backlog is the actual bottleneck for ad tech improvements, and seek low-code implementation partners to bypass it.

8. **Industry:** Provide publishers with lightweight, easily integrated "revenue now" solutions that require minimal developer resources and do not disrupt existing ad stacks.

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# **Publishers + AI: Navigating the Hype, the Hacks, and the Chumbox**

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: AGENTIC AI + RFP AUTOMATION**

When it comes to RFPs, the community is seeing real momentum. A publisher chopped their RFP response time from hours down to just eight minutes using a homegrown AI tool. But behind the scenes, publishers are sweating the "differentiation problem".

If everyone's AI is spitting out the exact same media plan, how do you stand out? The consensus is that AI should be used as a high-speed assistant to handle routine, manual tasks, but humans are absolutely critical for the custom, creative strategy. You let the bot do the data entry, but the human ultimately closes the deal.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: "VIBE CODING" YOUR OWN AD OPS TOOLS**

Ad ops professionals are having a renaissance. "Vibe coding" is really just a flashy new term for what ops teams have always done: duct-taping systems together as efficiently as possible. But now, armed with Claude, Gemini, and n8n, operators are, for example, building their own ads.txt verifiers, PMP deal-creation bots, and forecasting lookups.

The community's energy here is infectious – people are genuinely excited to build custom infrastructure on demand. However, it isn't perfect. Operators note that these AI coding tools still require heavy "hand-holding" and human oversight to prevent the bots from going off the rails.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: OPENAI ADS IN CHATGPT (THE NEW CHUMBOX)**

OpenAI's announcement that they are rolling out ads in ChatGPT has sparked serious eye-rolls across the community. As one member put it, "Silicon Valley reinvented the chumbox."

There is a palpable sense of betrayal and irony here.

First, these tech giants scraped and stole publisher content without compensation to train their models. Now, they are stealing the ad dollars and arbitrage models.

Publishers are bracing for a reality in which they not only have to fight AI platforms for audience attention but also compete directly with them for advertising budgets in walled-off, bespoke environments.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE "TRUST PARADOX" IN THE AI ERA**

There's a frustrating "double standard" emerging, heavily debated at recent events: users blindly trust AI platforms and readily hand over their deepest secrets, yet they increasingly scrutinize and mistrust individual human publishers.

It's a bitter pill to swallow. The hard truth operators are accepting is that "utility trumps trust". Consumers will hit the "easy button" for an AI answer without a second thought about where it came from.

Rather than just screaming about ethics, publishers realize they must fiercely protect their own "backyard" by building deep, experiential communities that offer something raw and human that AI simply cannot hallucinate.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: AGENTIC AI - EFFICIENCY VS. "VAPORWARE"**

Is agentic AI actually ready, or is it just the newest ad tech vaporware?

The community verdict: tactical use cases are incredibly real, but sweeping business overhauls are mostly hype. There are mind-blowing stats – like an 82% drop in supply chain costs for early agentic media buys – but publishers are deeply skeptical of giving an AI the keys to the castle.

The immediate anxiety: *"Who gets blamed when the AI fat-fingers a CPM and it takes half a day to notice?"*

The focus right now is on shifting the mindset from cost-cutting efficiency to actual human *productivity*—letting agents handle the rote tasks so humans can tackle the complex ones.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** If you haven't started evaluating or building an AI RFP response tool, start now, but ensure humans remain in the loop to preserve your custom value-add and differentiation.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Embrace "vibe coding" by investing in skill-building around AI tooling for your team, allowing them to automate rote tasks and upskill into high-level system design.
3. **Publishers:** Protect your owned audience "backyard" by shifting focus from rented search traffic to building deep, experiential communities that AI cannot commoditize.
4. **Ad Operations Management:** Draft an internal AI Operating Playbook to define strict guardrails, escalation protocols, and human review processes before granting AI tools full autonomy over your operations.
5. **Publishers:** Ensure your tech stack is prepared for agentic buyers by cleaning up your ads.txt, verifying your signals, and organizing your deals data so an AI agent can easily query and buy your inventory.
6. **Industry:** Address the compliance gap in agentic buying; build infrastructure to verify that AI buying agents follow standard data and privacy practices before scaling them.
7. **Publishers:** Do not concede the relationship; as AI search becomes the new "chumbox," aggressively lean into direct audience channels (newsletters, apps, authenticated users) to bypass AI gatekeepers.

# Programmatic Pipes:

## Adapting to New Integrations and Market Realities

### COMMUNITY TAKE: AMAZON'S STANDALONE PREBID ADAPTER VS. TAM

The community initially hoped Amazon's new Prebid adapter would allow them to easily ditch the Transparent Ad Marketplace (TAM) and simplify their stacks. However, early documentation caused confusion by suggesting the adapter only complemented existing setups rather than replacing them.

While some operators are eager to test the adapter to consolidate everything into Prebid, others remain hesitant. This hesitation is compounded by Amazon's recent infrastructure instability, massive weekend spend drops, and rigid demands to allowlist the AmazonAdBot. The debate is ongoing over whether to run hybrid setups or fully migrate.

### COMMUNITY TAKE: PARALLEL BIDDING - CLIENT VS. SERVER-SIDE TESTS

The industry has long debated whether client-side or server-side header bidding is superior, but recent large-scale tests reveal that the performance gaps are narrower than many expect. Server-side connections are often touted as the future for privacy and page speed, but they do not automatically guarantee higher revenue.

Instead of making sweeping changes based on hype, the community is adopting a "parallel bidding" approach. Operators are evaluating SSPs individually, keeping high-performing partners on the client-side while moving others to the server-side to create a customized, hybrid setup.

### COMMUNITY TAKE: THE TRADE DESK + ID PROVENANCE

The Trade Desk recently issued strict guidance demanding accurate ID provenance signals, requiring publishers and SSPs to pass forward original match method values to show exactly how user IDs are created and linked.

While some view this as a positive step toward transparency and cleaning up relabeled identifiers, others are highly skeptical.

Operators worry that enforcing these strict signals might break ID bridging practices that publishers currently rely on to maintain performance in cookieless environments. The underlying fear is that this could lead to lower revenue if buyers begin rejecting bridged IDs.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE:**

#### **PREBID 10.X - THE "UPGRADE AT YOUR OWN RISK" DILEMMA**

Upgrading to Prebid 10 has been a bumpy ride for many publishers.

Early adopters who moved to versions like 10.22 experienced severe thread-yielding issues and reported revenue drops of up to 10 percent, forcing many to roll back to the highly stable version 9. Operators noted that Prebid 9 handled high-strain situations better than the initial version 10 releases.

However, the release of version 10.23 addressed these critical bugs, and the community is now cautiously optimistic. Excitement is largely driven by the new "Shaping module" in 10.24, which offers powerful new yield tools to control which partners receive bid requests.

#### **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE MICROSOFT/XANDR T+C MIGRATION**

Microsoft's recent updates to the Xandr terms and conditions sparked immediate backlash. A vague clause appeared to grant Microsoft broad rights to reformat and utilize publisher content, raising alarms about unauthorized AI model training.

Although Microsoft provided email assurances that the clause does not cover AI data mining, they firmly refused to accept contract redlines.

Given that Xandr often represents a tiny fraction of total programmatic revenue, many publishers decided the legal headache was not worth it and opted to turn the bidder off completely rather than accept non-negotiable terms.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: THE "FIZZLE BEFORE THE SIZZLE" OF CURATION

Curation was recently the loudest buzzword in ad tech, heavily promoted by every SSP and featured in every sales deck. Now, the conversation has gone noticeably quiet, entering what the community calls the "fizzle before the sizzle".

But curation has not stopped; deals are still being built and margins are still being extracted behind the scenes. Operators are frustrated by agencies using SSP marketplaces to fulfill spend commitments while simultaneously stripping publishers of their ability to control floor pricing.

The community is actively debating whether curation has matured into a real product or if it is just another hidden toll booth.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** A/B test Amazon's new Prebid adapter alongside your existing TAM integration to measure true incremental value and performance differences.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Implement a parallel bidding strategy by individually testing SSPs to determine if they perform better on the client-side or server-side, rather than forcing all partners into a single model.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit your ID bridging setups and ensure you can accurately pass the match method values required by The Trade Desk to avoid having your bids rejected.
4. **Ad Operations Management:** If upgrading to Prebid 10, skip the early releases and move directly to version 10.23 or higher to avoid severe thread-yielding issues and revenue drops.

5. **Publishers:** Evaluate the revenue contribution of Xandr and decide if it justifies accepting their non-negotiable terms and conditions for content usage rights.
6. **Publishers:** Demand transparency from SSPs regarding curated marketplace deals and push back if agencies are using these paths to bypass your established open auction floors.
7. **Ad Operations Management:** Consider Prebid 10.24's new "Shaping module" as a yield tool to actively control and shape which demand partners get called during an auction.
8. **Industry:** Provide clearer, unified standards for ID provenance so publishers are not penalized for utilizing perfectly legitimate ID bridging tactics in cookieless environments.

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# Mobile App Monetization: Navigating Metrics, Formats, and Infrastructure

## COMMUNITY TAKE: METRICS OVERHAUL - ARPDAU VS. ARPU

The mobile app community is heavily debating the mathematically correct ways to evaluate monetization success, as operators realize that dividing total monthly revenue by daily active users (DAU) is fundamentally flawed.

Instead, the consensus requires balancing three distinct metrics to satisfy different departmental goals.

For the yield team, Ad Request CPM (RPM) is the gold standard because it evaluates raw programmatic demand yield without being skewed by traffic swings. For the finance team, ARPDAU (Average Revenue Per Daily Active User) is the perfect metric for daily financial forecasting and spotting immediate trouble on the platform, as it provides a clean, stable daily snapshot.

However, Product and RevOps teams warn that optimizing solely for ARPDAU can destroy the user experience and ignore long-term behavior. To capture the true, long-term value of an audience and accurately measure churn and retention, teams must rely on ARPU (Average Revenue Per User) calculated over 30, 90, or 180-day windows.

Ultimately, operators stress that maximizing short-term ARPDAU might not equate to maximizing long-term ARPU, requiring a harmonious balance of all three metrics.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: IN-APP DYNAMIC PRICE FLOORING

App publishers are desperately searching for a demand-agnostic dynamic flooring partner that can holistically cover all sources in Google Ad Manager, rather than just Prebid. Operators want to apply dynamic floors across AdX, Nimbus, and TAM simultaneously.

However, finding a purely modular solution is highly complicated; while vendors provide holistic flooring, they require publishers to run their entire tech stack.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: BANNER VS. NATIVE ADS IN APPS**

Publishers are evaluating the trade-offs between banner and native ads in app environments. While native ads provide a superior user experience, operators caution that relying exclusively on native executions severely limits available programmatic demand. Opening up standard banner inventory brings in significantly more money, leading to a community consensus that both formats should be allowed to freely compete.

For publishers operating apps that are essentially webviews (wrappers showing a website), operators strongly recommend integrating the Google Mobile Ads SDK to properly authorize the sale of inventory within the webview and run high-CPM interstitials.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE AMAZON IN-APP DISCONNECT**

App publishers leveraging Amazon TAM experienced brutal, unannounced drops in request volume, with some Android apps seeing inbound requests plunge by 50 percent.

The community discovered this was due to Amazon infrastructure upgrades, where the APS SDK silently routed to a new endpoint that failed to process privacy consent fields correctly. This lack of communication and erratic infrastructure stability, coupled with rigid demands to allowlist the AmazonAdBot, has exhausted the community. In response to the severe revenue drops and ignored support tickets, some frustrated publishers have entirely removed the Amazon APS SDK from their apps.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: MEDIATION SDKS + INFLATED METRICS**

When evaluating mediation SDKs like AppLovin's MAX against alternatives like Nimbus, Tradplus, or AdMob, operators are heavily scrutinizing how platforms define their

metrics. Specifically, the community has flagged that MAX's definition of an ad "request" makes it impossible to calculate true fill rates.

Furthermore, if an ad request goes unfilled, some SDKs will silently loop and request again multiple times, making it look like bid stuffing to DSPs and artificially inflating the publisher's request numbers. Operators favor platforms like Nimbus because they correctly report requests without these deceptive, hidden loops.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Stop dividing monthly revenue by daily active users (DAU) to calculate ARPU, as this mathematical error distorts long-term user value tracking.
2. **Publishers:** Use ARPDAU strictly for short-term daily financial forecasting, but rely on ARPU across 30, 90, and 180-day windows to evaluate the long-term impact of ad product changes on user retention.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Evaluate dynamic flooring solutions if you are running Prebid Server for holistic price flooring across AdX, TAM, and Nimbus.
4. **Publishers:** Allow standard programmatic banner demand to compete openly against native ads in your app to prevent leaving massive amounts of revenue on the table.
5. **Ad Operations Management:** If your app utilizes a webview, deploy the Google Mobile Ads SDK webview API to properly authorize the inventory and maximize yield.
6. **Ad Operations Management:** Monitor Amazon TAM performance daily and review SDK endpoint routing, as unannounced infrastructure changes and privacy consent processing errors have caused massive spend drops.

7. **Industry:** Standardize the definition of an ad "request" across mediation SDKs (like MAX) so publishers can accurately calculate true fill rates without hidden request loops artificially inflating numbers.
  
8. **Publishers:** Ensure your internal systems are updated to allowlist the AmazonAdBot, as failing to provide access will result in Amazon blocking your demand.

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# Rethinking Brand Safety: From Theater to Performance

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

The digital advertising industry often treats brand safety as a technical problem solved by blunt keyword blocklists, but this approach actively harms publishers and advertisers alike. Premium publishers see massive portions of safe inventory misclassified as unsafe, leading to severe drops in eCPMs.

For example, simple sports articles are frequently demonetized permanently because words like "shot" trigger automated blocks.

Instead of pleading with buyers about fairness, the most successful publisher strategies now reframe brand safety discussions into performance impact stories, proving to advertisers that avoiding news environments limits their reach and degrades their campaign results.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY SAYS

Behind the scenes, operators are exhausted by what they call brand safety theater. They recognize that SSP and DSP engagement on safety standards is largely out of their control. Furthermore, there is deep frustration over a double standard where buyers readily fund less restrictive social platforms while heavily penalizing premium journalism.

**In response, the Beeler.Tech community is shifting away from complaining and moving toward positive reinforcement by launching [The Navigator Award](#).**

This initiative specifically recognizes agencies and brands making intentional choices to support hard news and trusted environments rather than taking the easy way out. Ultimately, publishers are realizing they must build tiered suitability models to give buyers safe options without accepting widespread demonetization.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Run a comprehensive brand safety audit to measure exactly how much of your genuinely safe inventory is currently being blocked by buyers.
2. **Publishers:** Shift your buyer conversations away from brand safety complaints and instead present a data-backed performance impact story that highlights missed reach.
3. **Industry:** Stop relying on blunt keyword blocklists that fail to understand context and unfairly penalize vital journalism and news environments.
4. **Ad Operations Management:** Build a tiered suitability model that allows advertisers who care deeply about safety to find appropriate inventory without resorting to broad overblocking.
5. **Publishers:** Nominate forward thinking agencies and brands for The Navigator Award to positively reinforce those who intentionally invest in news environments.
6. **Ad Operations Management:** Create a proactive brand safety document to share directly with buy side partners to increase transparency and defend your inventory.
7. **Publishers:** Engage directly with the IAB Brand Safety Specification initiatives so that your voice influences the standards before they are strictly enforced.

# CTV Monetization: Navigating Fragmentation, Multiscreen Habits, + Premium Yield

## COMMUNITY TAKE:

### CTV SUPPLY/DEMAND + THE "WINDOWING" FRUSTRATION

The CTV market is grappling with an oversupply of inventory as consumers transition from cable and accept ad-supported tiers to offset rising subscription fees.

Operators note that supply is significantly outpacing demand, meaning future CPMs will be dictated by premium content quality and lighter ad break cadences rather than pure fill rates. Compounding this is the frustration of "windowing" where shows jump between streaming services or disappear entirely.

While windowing allows more content to be greenlit, it creates a fragmented nightmare for buyers trying to execute unified targeting and measurement across different providers.

### COMMUNITY TAKE: SUPER BOWL MULTISCREEN STRATEGY

The Super Bowl highlighted a major shift in viewer behavior, proving that tentpole television events are no longer just TV moments but multiscreen audience engines. Viewers actively juggled streams between platforms like Peacock, GoogleTV, and Xfinity while simultaneously engaging with secondary mobile devices.

The community observes that this multiscreen habit creates a massive opportunity to capture human attention during ad pods.

Publishers are realizing they must adapt by deploying synchronized, multiscreen strategies to capture revenue from brands looking to capitalize on this distracted, multi-device viewing behavior.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: SYNCING DISPLAY + VIDEO FOR SPONSORSHIPS**

Publishers are actively troubleshooting how to seamlessly sync display and video ad calls for high-value day takeovers and sponsorships. Because display and video often operate on separate ad request architectures, syncing them is notoriously difficult.

Operators recommend using consistent Key-Value Pairs (KVPs) across both formats to target specific site sections. Alternative tactics include delaying the video tag to fire only after the deciding display slot renders, or including a custom native ad in the display response that passes a KVP directly to the video player. Strict trafficking hygiene is critical, as a single missing target can ruin the entire takeover.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE PREMIUM CTV YIELD DISCONNECT**

There is a massive disconnect between the premium reputation of CTV and the reality of its yield mechanics. Many programmatic pipes in CTV are disjointed, causing conflicting signals and uneven competition. Furthermore, as CTV inventory scales, publishers are increasingly experimenting with new formats like L-Bar units, squeeze-backs, and pause ads to drive revenue.

However, optimizing these units requires extreme precision. The community warns against biased optimization that favors a single demand source. Instead, operators advocate for demand-agnostic orchestration and real-time machine learning to dynamically manage floor pricing and demand selection on a per-auction basis.

## **COMMUNITY NUANCE: CTV MEASUREMENT + DATA FIDELITY**

The battle to prove CTV works is over; the focus has shifted to "performance TV" and updating the Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM) playbook. However, operators are sounding the alarm on data fidelity.

Because a television is inherently a shared, co-viewing device, individual targeting is fundamentally flawed and often results in wasted impressions when the wrong household member is watching.

The community suggests lowering hyper-targeting expectations and instead embracing contextual considerations, leaning on the program's content as a strong, privacy-safe proxy for the audience.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Sync display and video sponsorships by applying identical Key-Value Pairs (KVPs) across both ad requests or delaying video tags until display slots render.
2. **Publishers:** Capitalize on multiscreen viewing habits during major events by offering cross-device packages that capture audience attention while they scroll on secondary devices during CTV ad pods.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Deploy demand-agnostic optimization and real-time machine learning for CTV auctions instead of relying on static floors or biased demand paths.
4. **Publishers:** Lean into contextual targeting for CTV inventory rather than promising flawless 1-to-1 targeting, as shared household viewing inherently distorts individual data fidelity.
5. **Industry:** Standardize targeting and measurement capabilities across fragmented CTV providers to alleviate the campaign management headaches caused by content windowing.
6. **Publishers:** Prioritize lighter ad loads and premium content experiences to maintain high CTV CPMs, as sheer inventory supply is currently outpacing buyer demand.
7. **Ad Operations Management:** Test non-intrusive CTV ad formats like L-Bar units, squeeze-backs, and pause ads to drive incremental revenue without disrupting the viewer experience.

# Commerce Media: Navigating Retail Demand, Agentic Shopping, + Trust

## COMMUNITY TAKE:

### AGENTIC SHOPPING SKEPTICISM VS. DISINTERMEDIATION

The industry is heavily debating the impact of AI agentic shopping. While Silicon Valley expects AI agents to handle the purchasing process, the community argues that humans genuinely enjoy the activity of browse-shopping. Furthermore, major retailers (like Walmart, Target, and Uber) make massive profits from their own media networks and will fight aggressively against being disintermediated by AI agents.

However, publishers do expect the upper funnel to change significantly; AI assistants will likely handle research and filtering before handing the session off to a human for the final purchase. There is also a warning that if AI removes brand influence, the model will eventually break and be monetized by the highest bidder to tell users what to want.

## COMMUNITY TAKE:

### TAPPING INTO "LONG-TAIL" RETAIL MEDIA NETWORKS

Retail media is growing faster than expected, and publishers who are not traditional retailers are eager to capture this demand.

The community is closely following experts like Kiri Masters on long-tail retail media networks, exploring how publishers with commerce content and high-intent data can bring their inventory to market.

Operators are actively asking about experiences working directly with platforms like CitrusAds, Criteo, and Adtelligent to deliver product listing ads or sponsored product listings. They are searching for easy integrations that provide unique retail media demand without heavy operational lift.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: AUTOMATING E-COMMERCE INTEGRATION**

Many publishers manually integrate affiliate links, but the focus is shifting toward AI-driven automation to maximize Revenue Per Session. Operators are testing solutions which use AI agents to process millions of SKUs from hundreds of e-commerce feeds and match them dynamically to page content and user behavior in real time.

By moving away from static affiliate links to intelligent, contextually relevant product units, publishers can secure unique ad revenue while keeping users engaged on the page longer.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: BRIDGING CONTENT TO COMMERCE (THE TRUST FACTOR)**

As publishers build out their next river of revenue, commerce and affiliate streams are becoming core business lines rather than incremental add-ons. However, the community stresses that the bridge from content to commerce must be built intentionally to protect the publisher and audience relationship. Affiliate marketing only works when it is highly contextual and relevant, rather than purely transactional. Publishers are advised to treat intent content (like reviews and how-tos) carefully, ensuring that e-commerce integrations do not dilute overall ad RPMs or break user trust.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: AMAZON E-COMMERCE REPORTING FRUSTRATIONS**

Publishers relying on Amazon for e-commerce and affiliate revenue have recently faced significant hurdles due to new reporting changes. The community describes the situation as highly frustrating, citing a severe loss of granular visibility and emerging data gaps.

Operators are actively crowdsourcing actionable steps to address these reporting black holes, as the lack of clear data makes it incredibly difficult to track true e-commerce performance and optimize content effectively.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Build the bridge from content to commerce intentionally by ensuring affiliate integrations are contextual rather than purely transactional to protect user trust.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Evaluate dynamic e-commerce solutions that use AI to automatically match product SKUs to content in real time, moving away from manual affiliate link placement.
3. **Publishers:** Productize your high-intent, evergreen content (like reviews and how-tos) specifically for affiliate and commerce media monetization.
4. **Industry:** Provide better reporting solutions and granular visibility for e-commerce revenue, specifically addressing the data gaps recently introduced by Amazon's reporting changes.
5. **Ad Operations Management:** Test integrations with retail media platforms like CitrusAds, Criteo, or Adtelligent to evaluate the operational ease of delivering sponsored product listing ads.
6. **Publishers:** Prepare your upper-funnel content for agentic shopping by optimizing for AI assistants that will conduct product research and filtering before human checkout.
7. **Ad Operations Management:** Monitor the impact of e-commerce ad units on your page to ensure they are driving higher overall Revenue Per Session without cannibalizing standard programmatic yield.
8. **Publishers:** Treat commerce media as a standalone profit and loss center and core business line, requiring cross-functional alignment between editorial and revenue teams.

# **Privacy + Compliance: Navigating Migrations, Regulations, + Consent**

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: SOURCEPOINT TO DIDOMI MIGRATION**

Sourcepoint's acquisition by Didomi has publishers weighing their long term options. While Sourcepoint will support TCF framework changes until the migration completes in the first half of 2027, no new functionality will be added.

Operators are debating whether to migrate to Didomi or find a new Consent Management Platform entirely. The decision largely hinges on whether a publisher needs basic "surface level consent" for programmatic campaigns or complex "orchestrated consent" that ties into Customer Data Platforms and subscriptions.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: CIPA PREDATORY LAWSUITS**

California publishers are facing a wave of predatory lawsuits from law firms alleging data privacy violations under the California Invasion of Privacy Act. While the path of least resistance is often settling for a small amount, the community feels this sets a dangerous precedent and fails to protect publishers in the future.

Instead of settling baseless claims, operators are successfully fighting back by enlisting outside counsel or providing detailed technical pushback proving the claims are unfounded, which often makes the predatory firms walk away entirely.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: GDPR + THE "LEGAL" TCF VENDOR LIST**

When auditing European web monetization, publishers often find a massive list of vendors lacking consent. However, the community strictly warns against bulk enabling the entire Transparency and Consent Framework vendor list to fix this.

Under GDPR, publishers must explicitly disclose which vendors access personal data, and they must have signed Data Processing Agreements and active business relationships with them.

Simply turning on the global TCF list is legally risky, prompting operators to curate their lists and use Google's additional consent module for non TCF partners.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: TCF 2.3 UPGRADE + THE OPT OUT SPIKE**

The transition to TCF 2.3 made the "Disclosed Vendors" segment mandatory, ensuring users actually see the vendors processing their data. While the industry consensus was that forcing a re consent was unnecessary, publishers updating their CMPs experienced severe opt out spikes, with some jumping from 15 to 25 percent.

The community discovered this spike was heavily driven by users with "unknown" geolocations, suggesting that the new CMP versions are far more aggressive in automatically respecting browser level privacy signals like Global Privacy Control.

### **COMMUNITY TAKE: STATE LEVEL AI + PRIVACY LEGISLATION**

While federal regulation remains stalled, states like California and Colorado are aggressively passing laws and regulations impacting digital advertising and AI. The community is actively tracking these state level efforts, such as California's DELETE Act which targets data brokers, and emerging AI transparency labeling requirements.

Operators realize they must build flexible privacy architectures that can adapt locally rather than waiting for a unified national standard to dictate their policies.

### **HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS**

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Evaluate your current Consent Management Platform needs to determine if you require basic surface level consent or complex orchestrated consent before migrating to a new vendor.

2. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit your TCF vendor list to ensure you only enable vendors with whom you have signed Data Processing Agreements and active business relationships.
3. **Publishers:** Do not bulk enable the entire global TCF vendor list on your site, as this violates GDPR requirements for explicit user disclosure.
4. **Ad Operations Management:** Monitor your opt out rates closely after deploying TCF 2.3 updates, specifically looking for spikes from unknown geolocations driven by Global Privacy Control signals.
5. **Publishers:** Avoid forcing a full user re consent for TCF 2.3 unless explicitly required, as older consent strings generally remain valid.
6. **Publishers:** Monitor and adapt to emerging state level legislation like those in California and Colorado regarding AI transparency and data deletion, rather than waiting for federal action.

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# LiveIntent Lift Decline

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

Publishers using LiveIntent for bid enrichment are reporting a sharp, sudden decline in lift percentages moving into 2026. While LiveIntent attributes this to general traffic declines reducing the volume of "treatable impressions," publishers are questioning the math, noting that a percentage-based lift should theoretically remain stable regardless of volume drops.

This has prompted operators to investigate whether this is an isolated issue or a widespread platform problem.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY SAYS

The community suspects this decline reveals a hidden "critical mass" threshold required for LiveIntent to actually be impactful. Operators are actively debating whether dropping below a certain traffic volume inherently destabilizes the tool's lift percentage.

This highlights a broader frustration: vendors blaming macro traffic drops for performance issues without addressing the underlying proportional math, forcing publishers to crowdsource their own performance benchmarks to find the truth.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit your LiveIntent reporting to determine if your specific lift percentage drop correlates directly with your traffic dipping below a certain minimum threshold.
2. **Publishers:** Demand clearer mathematical explanations from your ad tech vendors when they attempt to attribute percentage-based performance declines solely to raw traffic volume drops.

3. **Ad Operations Management:** A/B test LiveIntent against alternative identity and bid enrichment partners to determine if the lift decline is an isolated vendor issue or a broader cookieless monetization trend.
4. **Industry:** Provide transparent documentation on "critical mass" impression requirements so publishers know exactly when a bid enrichment tool loses its statistical efficacy.

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# Outstream Video Partner Performance

## HERE'S THE LOWDOWN

Publishers are actively seeking the best outstream programmatic video partners to drive healthy sell-through and eCPMs, specifically for "pure outstream" (standalone video ads within articles) rather than accompanied content, which is notoriously hard to monetize.

Top vendor recommendations include Teads InRead, JWX (formerly Connatix), EX.CO, and Assertive Yield's hybrid wrapper. In Europe, Invibes is performing well with direct demand, and Minute Media is also emerging as a strong outstream contender.

## WHAT OUR COMMUNITY SAYS

The community distinguishes heavily between pure outstream and video players that pass "accompanying content" signals, noting the latter struggles heavily with programmatic monetization.

Operators also highlight regional differences; for example, Invibes thrives in Europe without requiring ads.txt lines due to its unique direct demand model.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** A/B test pure outstream video players (like EX.CO, JWX, or Minute Media) against your current setup to evaluate true incremental eCPM and sell-through lift.
2. **Publishers:** Shift your video monetization focus toward "pure outstream" standalone video ads within article content, as buyer demand for accompanied content remains difficult to monetize effectively.

3. **Ad Operations Management:** Evaluate regional outstream partners (Invibes in Europe) that provide unique direct demand and simplify ads.txt management.
4. **Industry:** Clearly differentiate between pure outstream and accompanying content video signals in bid requests so buyers can accurately price and target video inventory.

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# Google Ad Manager: Actionable Strategies to Maximize Platform Value

## ACTION STEPS FOR AD OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

1. **Optimize AdX and AdSense Competition:** Do not set AdSense to "House" priority, as this prevents it from backfilling effectively and leaves impressions blank. Instead, let AdX and AdSense compete on a level playing field by setting them at the same priority or properly mapping AdSense to Ad Manager to maximize your fill and overall CPMs.
2. **Utilize Interactive Report Flags:** Cut down on reporting noise by using the flag feature within GAM's Interactive Reports. You can set custom conditions so that reports are only emailed to your team when a specific row is flagged, helping you spot anomalies instantly.
3. **Synchronize Display and Video Takeovers:** For high-value sponsorships or day takeovers, seamlessly sync your display and video ad calls by applying identical Key-Value Pairs (KVPs) to target specific site sections, or use companion ads tied to KVPs to ensure the same advertiser populates across all formats.
4. **Optimize Key-Value Payloads for Speed:** GAM server latency is driven by the number of eligible line items it has to check, not necessarily the byte size of the request. To speed up your auctions, limit the total number of keys you use and consolidate targeting values into fewer keys.
5. **Clean Up Signals for Demand Facilitation:** Ensure your GAM signals—such as 1P audiences, KVs, naming conventions, and IAB context categories—are pristine. Google's Exchange Platform team uses these signals for their "Demand Facilitation" service to match your inventory with incoming PG/PMP RFPs, bringing you budgets you wouldn't normally have access to.

6. **Activate Ads Traffic Navigator:** Turn on the "Premium reporting experience" via GAM's Advanced features to unlock the Ads Traffic Navigator. This tool provides intuitive visualizations of your ad traffic lifecycle, making it much easier to troubleshoot blocked ads and optimize demand sources.
7. **Align GAM and GA4 for A/B Testing:** Bridge the gap between ad delivery and user experience by passing the same A/B test key-values into GAM and custom dimensions into GA4. This allows you to measure exactly how specific ad units (like sticky banners) impact critical engagement metrics such as bounce rate and pageviews per session.
8. **Target for Accessibility:** Third-party ad tags often lack proper alt-text and accessibility standards. To prevent these ads from ruining the experience for users relying on screen readers or keyboards, deploy a script to detect keyboard navigation and use GAM targeting to ensure only fully accessible, in-house image ads serve to those users.
9. **Bypass Pricing Rule Limits:** If your GAM interface is missing the native download/upload buttons for pricing rules, leverage open-source browser extensions or custom API console UIs. These tools allow you to seamlessly bulk-edit floor prices and completely bypass GAM's standard 200-rule limit.

# Ad Ops Issues: Airing of the Grievances

## COMMUNITY TAKE:

### THE IAB TAXONOMY NEEDS WORK (CUSTOM DATA STRATEGY)

Operators are heavily criticizing the IAB Ad Product taxonomy for being outdated, noting it has not been revisited in over a decade. It is viewed as overly generic, failing to distinguish between specific live sports or streaming services.

The community sentiment is that the taxonomy is lacking with operators feeling the IAB's stance is to "use the crappy thing" until a better version arrives. To compensate, ad ops teams are building custom internal data taxonomies, blending open-source crosswalks, or enriching product tags with more robust audience taxonomy signals to adequately capture intent for buyers.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: "HEAVY AD" INTERVENTIONS

Revenue loss from unmonetized traffic remains a major operational focus. Operators are seeking clarity on Chrome's "Heavy Ad Interventions," noting that when Chrome blocks an ad for using too many resources, payment is affected because the ad content is not fully downloaded and no impression is recorded.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: DASHBOARD DEBT + ALERT FATIGUE

Ad ops teams are drowning in underutilized dashboards and alert fatigue. Operators warn that "dashboard debt is real," noting that structured data alone does not reduce operational burden unless it is properly contextualized. To combat this, teams at publishers are encoding ad ops domain knowledge into playbooks, allowing AI to detect anomalies and push a concise set of alerts per day directly into Slack channels.

The consensus is to meet the team where they already work and deliver operational intelligence via messaging apps rather than forcing them to log into yet another UI.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: THE DEVELOPER BACKLOG BOTTLENECK

A massive hurdle for ad ops teams is the speed at which they can execute stack upgrades, often trapped behind rigid engineering queues. The community notes that if the dev backlog is the primary bottleneck for ad ops improvements, that organizational gap is the actual problem to solve, not the ad stack itself.

Successful case studies show that bringing ad ops and engineering into true collaboration, sometimes via comprehensive stack overhaul RFPs, acts as an organizational fix, dramatically reducing time-to-market for new monetization levers.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: BURNOUT + THE END OF "HERO CULTURE"

Behind the scenes, the ad ops community is acknowledging a severe retention crisis driven by burnout. Operators emphasize that ad ops burnout is not a failure of personal resilience, but rather a systems design failure. The industry relies too heavily on "hero culture," where single individuals hold all the institutional knowledge, leaving teams one vacation away from a crisis.

Ad ops management is pushing to replace heroics with formal escalation policies and robust documentation, reframing documentation not as bureaucracy, but as essential sustainability infrastructure.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Ad Operations Management:** Monitor Chrome "Heavy Ad Interventions" to catch resource-heavy creatives failing to download, resulting in lost revenue.
2. **Ad Operations Management:** Write down escalation policies and documentation to eliminate "hero culture" and prevent single points of failure.
3. **Publishers:** Evaluate your engineering workflow; if the developer backlog is the main bottleneck for ad ops improvements, restructure the collaboration between dev and revenue teams to increase speed to market.

4. **Ad Operations Management:** Audit your active dashboards to eliminate "dashboard debt" and move operational alerts directly into team messaging apps, like Slack, to improve visibility and response times.
5. **Ad Operations Management:** Combine audience taxonomy tags with product tags to enrich your bid requests, providing buyers with better proxies for user intent when contextual categories fall short.
6. **Industry:** Update and modernize standardized taxonomies, like the IAB Ad Product spec, so publishers do not have to rely on custom, fragmented data mapping to communicate inventory value.

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# **Publisher Representation: Earning a Seat at the Table**

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: "TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION" IN AD TECH**

Too many industry organizations are developing solutions that impact publishers, yet publishers are either not invited, sending the wrong people, or failing to speak up. When the MRC finalized its Ad Auction Standards, it went over like a lead balloon in the community, with operators wondering if publishers were even consulted.

Similar frustrations exist around the W3C and the IAB requesting comments on new IO Direct Buy Specs. The community recognizes a harsh truth: if publishers do not meaningfully participate and push back in these working groups, they will continue to suffer from ad tech taxation without representation.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE IAB ALM + PUBLIC POLICY DISCONNECT**

Opinions on the IAB ALM are deeply polarized. While some dismiss it as an exclusive club where executives stand around like it is the industry equivalent of fancy scotch and cigarettes, others argue it is a necessary evil to meet the people making major decisions.

However, operators were disappointed by the recent IAB Public Policy and Legal Summit, noting glaring omissions in the agenda. Specifically, publishers expressed frustration when David Cohen announced there were "no updates" regarding landmark legislation to prevent AI companies from stealing publisher content.

## **COMMUNITY TAKE: THE CAPITAL ROOMS + INVESTMENT CONVERSATIONS**

The community is realizing that the future of publishing is frequently debated in rooms where publishers are absent. At events like the Advertising Economic Forum, venture capitalists, private equity firms, and corporate development teams are deciding which media business models are defensible and which revenue streams are drying up.

Publishers are the implicit variable in these investor equations, especially as AI agents threaten to restructure product discovery. Operators emphasize that publishers must get into these capital rooms, otherwise they will be the last to know when decisions about their financial destinies have already been made.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: GETTING "STEAMROLLED" BY AGENTIC STANDARDS

As the industry pivots toward AI agents, publishers are noticing a concerning lack of sell side voices in foundational groups. When initiatives like [agenticadvertising.org](https://www.agenticadvertising.org) launched, the community quickly flagged that the founding members were almost exclusively buy side and ad tech companies.

Operators are urging one another to get involved in these AI and agentic working groups immediately, warning that without proper publisher representation, the sell side will simply get steamrolled by new programmatic agent protocols.

## COMMUNITY TAKE: FORMING COALITIONS + FIGHTING BACK

Faced with these asymmetric industry dynamics, there is a loud rallying cry for a true publisher coalition to band together. The community is actively praising the News/Media Alliance for making waves by launching industry lawsuits against AI content theft, noting that unlike other trade bodies, the NMA actually fights for its constituents.

Additionally, publishers are calling for engagement with emerging initiatives like SPUR (Standards for Publisher Usage Rights) to protect original journalism from unauthorized scraping. The consensus is clear: publishers must define their own market value rather than relying on others to do it for them.

## HERE ARE YOUR ACTION ITEMS

1. **Publishers:** Band together and meaningfully participate in organizations like the IAB, W3C, and MRC to ensure new standards are not finalized without aggressive sell side representation.

2. **Publishers:** Stop relying on intermediaries to determine your value and engage in broader capital discussions to ensure you are in the room when investors and PE firms evaluate media business models.
3. **Ad Operations Management:** Send your top talent to industry events and technical working groups, instructing them to actively advocate for your business rather than just listening quietly.
4. **Ad Operations Management:** Review and submit formal comments on technical documentation, such as the IAB IO Direct Buy Specs or the MRC Auction Transparency Standards, before they are enforced.
5. **Industry:** Ensure that founding committees for new technologies, like agentic buying standards and AI protocols, include equal and active publisher representation from day one.
6. **Publishers:** Support and participate in trade bodies that actively fight for publisher rights, such as the News/Media Alliance, to combat AI content theft.
7. **Publishers:** Engage with emerging initiatives like SPUR (Standards for Publisher Usage Rights) to establish unified global terms that protect original journalism.
8. **Industry:** Move beyond superficial industry event networking and address the existential legal and compensation protections that publishers require to survive in an AI driven ecosystem.