

A close-up photograph of two women smiling and looking at a tablet. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a pink sweater. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a white sweater. The background is blurred green foliage.

A FUTURE WITHOUT ADVERTISING COOKIES?

It's possible!



reclame



INTRODUCTION

Consumers are becoming more and more aware of the adverse consequences of sharing personal data¹; increasingly they are pleading for protection of privacy.

A cry that is being picked up, because in the world of online advertising the era of *third party cookies* appears to be ending, now that browsers such as Safari and Firefox are blocking these types of cookies. We are heading towards a future in which the online advertising market is radically changing. What does this mean for the online advertising options and for your brand's campaigns?

Ster is the first saleshouse in the Netherlands to embrace this future, using the technology of Ortec Adscience and Adhese. Now that it's becoming increasingly difficult to place advertising cookies in the near future, we have put together all

the insights you and your brand need to know about online advertising without using personal data. First, we will address the need for an online advertising world without advertising cookies. Subsequently, using research results and a number of cases, we will show you that an online campaign without cookies is equally effective as one with cookies. Finally, we will discuss an alternative method of targeting commercials effectively without the use of personal data.

¹ DDMA Privacy Monitor 2019

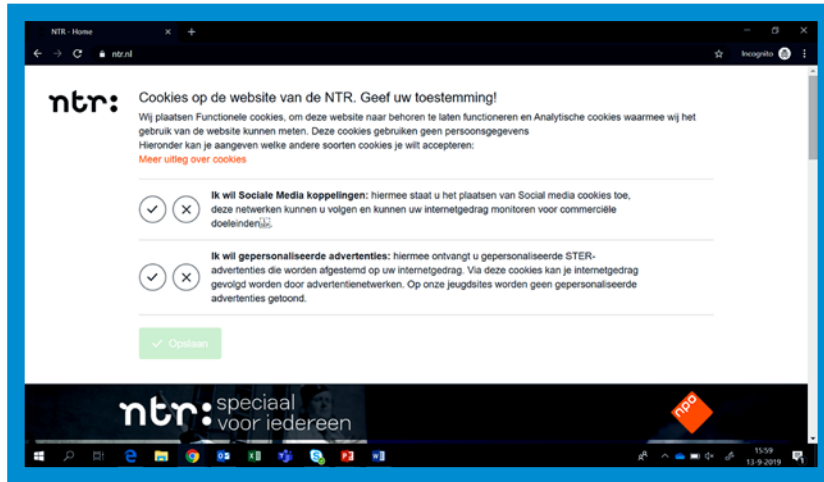


1. BACKGROUND

A GROWING NEED FOR A WORLD WITHOUT ADVERTISING COOKIES

THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

If you have watched any episodes of **Boer Zoekt Vrouw**, **Wie Is de Mol?** or **Beste Zangers** on demand on the NPO platforms since May 2018, you will have been confronted with the infamous cookie screen: ‘I would like personalised advertisements’. The advertising cookies determined through this screen were necessary to be able to place commercials according to your interests based on previous internet browsing.



Through this screen, in compliance with the GDPR², the NPO explicitly asked visitors per website whether they agreed with the placement and use of advertising cookies (herein after ‘cookies’). These cookies made it possible to show the visitor personalised advertisements. According to lawyers such an explicit screen was the only correct way in which to ask for permission. This was confirmed when towards the end of 2019 [the Dutch Data Protection Authority \(AP\) determined that a large number of Dutch websites were still asking for permission for these cookies in an incorrect manner and subsequently called on them to change their conduct](#)³. Explicitly asking for consent was therefore an obligation.

This obligation, although positive for the protection of the visitors’ privacy, came with some challenges for the online advertising market since only one in ten visitors agreed to be shown personalised advertisements.

INTERNET BROWSERS NO LONGER SUPPORT THE USE OF ADVERTISING COOKIES

[Research](#) also clearly showed the need for the protection of privacy: a vast majority of Dutch people wanted more control, transparency and flexibility regarding the data they were providing companies with.⁴ This was the signal for internet browsers to act: Safari and Firefox, among others, blocked third party cookies by default and by the end of 2021, Chrome – [with a market share of an impressive 55 per cent](#)⁵ – will follow as well.

² General Data Protection Regulation

³ Autoriteit persoonsgegevens, AP: Veel websites vragen op onjuiste wijze toestemming voor plaatsen tracking cookies, 2019

⁴ DDMA Privacy Monitor 2019

⁵ Statcounter: Browser Market Share Netherlands, April 2020

This step taken by these browsers, who together serve over 86 percent of the market, will make it impossible to track the surfing behaviour of a visitor. This means as of 2021 it will no longer be possible to build up profiles of visitors for targeted advertising. The future of personalised advertisements based on third party cookies will therefore unavoidably change.

With this in mind, on 1 January 2020, Ster was the first saleshouse in the Dutch online landscape to cease using cookies for advertising purposes. The visitor's wish for privacy has hereby been respected, but what does this mean for your online campaign and its results? We investigated these questions, both for display and for video, and are happy to be able to share our findings with you.

"We noticed that only ten percent of our visitors consented to personalised advertisements. This means that 90 percent of our visitors had no desire for personalised commercials, whatsoever. Then you must ask yourself what the added value of personalised advertising is. Should you continue using personal data? Our visitors gave us the resounding answer that it was definitely not what they wanted."

Linda Worp, Product manager Digital at Ster



2. DISPLAY NO DIFFERENCE IN QUALITY

In the second half of 2019, we conducted a test with a number of brands. We served their display campaigns via two routes:

- ▶ Half of the campaign was served to *opt-in users*: these visitors explicitly consented to personalised advertisements based on cookies.
- ▶ The other half was served to *opt-out users*: these visitors did *not* consent to personalised advertisements based on cookies.

We compared the quality of these two routes by looking at the number of clicks and the number of people that landed on the brand's website. For some of the campaigns, we also gained insight into the conversion rates per route.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS ON CLICK RATES AND LANDING RATIO?

To answer this question, we will look into the results of the two routes for the campaigns by [Eliza Was Here](#), [Etos](#), [American Express](#) and [Krant.nl](#). When we look at the click-through rate (the number of clicks on a banner versus the number of impressions) for these campaigns, we do not see any major differences between both routes: display campaigns which were served without cookies, generated the same volume of traffic to the website as campaigns that used cookie data.

"Display campaigns which were served without cookies, generated the same volume of traffic to the website as campaigns that used cookie data."

But do the people who click on the banner actually arrive on the brand's website? Or do they perhaps click inadvertently and then close the page before it has fully loaded? The landing ratios are able to tell us more about this. This is the ratio between the number of clicks and the number of arrivals on the landing page.

Once again, we see no major differences between both routes. The charts on the next page show the results for Eliza Was Here and Etos. The campaigns by American Express and Krant.nl showed similar results.⁶

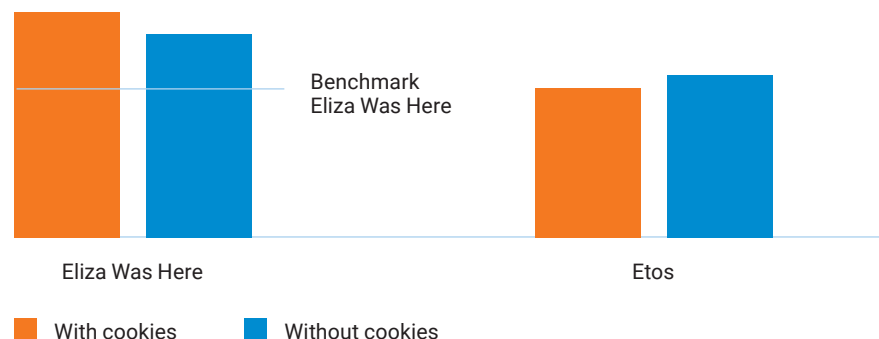
See graphs on the next page >

⁶In light of the comparable results of the four campaigns and the wish to ensure clarity, we have highlighted two of the four campaigns.

CLICK-THROUGH RATE



LANDING RATIO



In short: whether you do or do not use advertising cookies, visitors click through to the website and allow the landing page to load completely just as often via both routes.

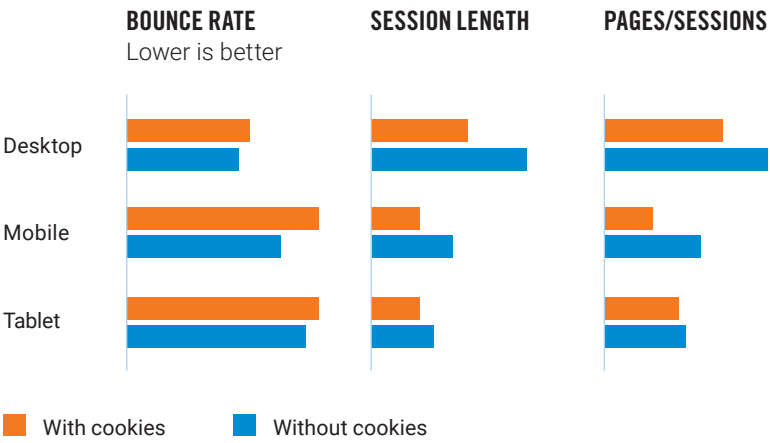
WHAT ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE CLICKS?

Is there a difference when it comes to the quality of the clicks? In order to find out, we look at the key performance indicators (KPIs) such as bounce rate, session length and number of pages per session:

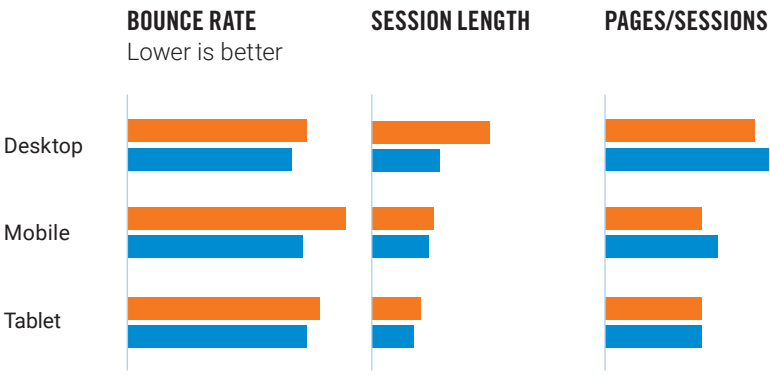
- ▶ The **bounce rate** tells you what share of the visitors closed the page after clicking. A 'bounce' is measured when people do not click through to a next page on the website.
- ▶ The **session length** shows the average length of time that a website was visited.
- ▶ The **number of pages** shows how many pages were visited on average per session.

Once again, on these points the two routes generally did not differ strongly from each other. So, whether you run a display campaign with or without cookies, the behaviour on your website after the consumer has clicked on the banner is mostly equal and in some cases even better without cookies. The chart on the next page illustrates this once again for the campaigns for Eliza Was Here and Etos. Once more, we saw similar performances for the campaigns for American Express and Krant.nl.

ELIZA WAS HERE



ETOS



"Together with NPO/Ster we set up a display campaign in order to compare consent vs. no consent. As far as the visitor statistics on our website are concerned, we see that the no-consent-group scores well and sometimes even better than the consent-group. A beautiful, unexpected result!"

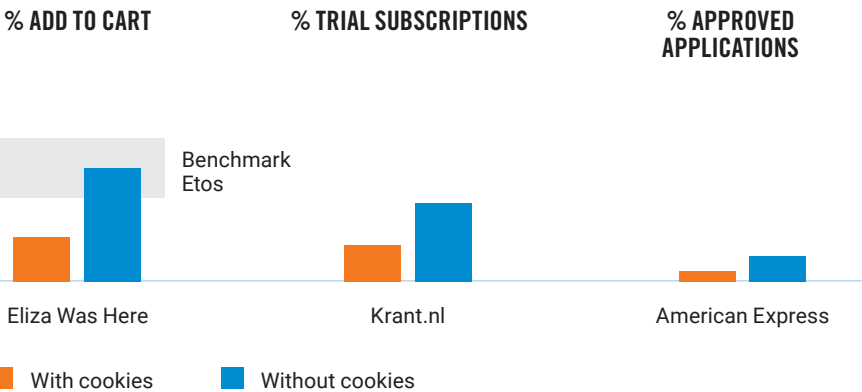
Femke Verveen, Senior online marketer for Eliza Was Here

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE RESULT IN TERMS OF CONVERSION?

Of course, the effect of the two routes on conversion is the most interesting KPI to look at. We were able to measure the conversions for three of the participating campaigns: Etos, Krant.nl and American Express. One of the aspects Etos paid attention to in their campaign, was the share of visitors that added products to their virtual shopping basket. This share was higher via the route without cookies than via the route with cookies and was in line with Etos' internal benchmark. This means that the campaign without cookies holds its own compared to previous campaigns that Etos has run with cookies.

We saw the same results in conversions of the campaigns for Krant.nl and American Express: for Krant.nl, a conversion was a consumer signing up for a trial subscription; for American Express, it was an approved application for a credit card. Again, the results show that display campaigns without cookies can perform just as good in achieving the conversion objectives as campaigns based on cookies.

Based on these results we can state that a display campaign without cookies can work equally well as a campaign based on personal data: the quality of the clicks and what people subsequently do on the brand's website are generally comparable.



"At American Express we are continuously working on new developments in the fast-changing media landscape. This is why we sat down with Ster at an early stage regarding the testing of advertising without cookies. These interesting test results illustrate that this method of advertising offers new opportunities and helps us develop a vision on its effects."

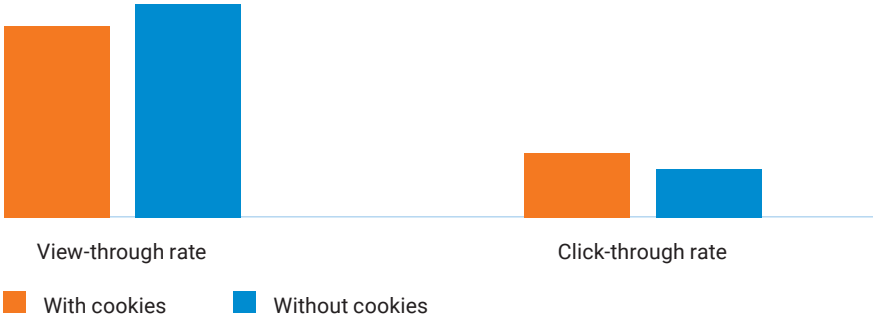
Patrick Nap, Manager Digital Acquisition for American Express



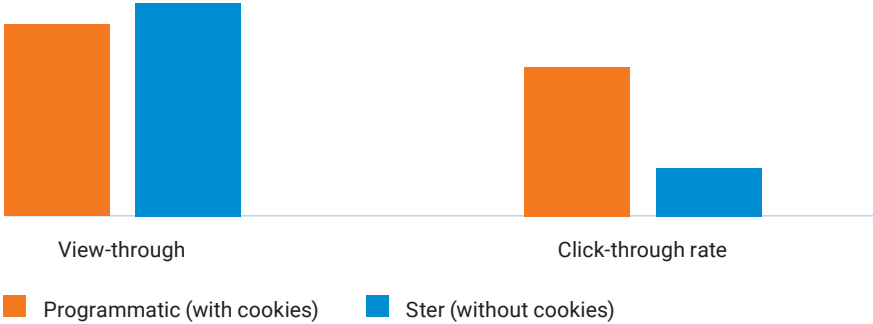
3. ONLINE VIDEO NON-PERSONALISED IS EQUALLY EFFECTIVE

In addition to display advertisements, we also looked at the effects for online video. Over a period of six months, we followed a number of online campaigns to identify the effects of video advertising without advertising cookies. Once again, we ran the campaigns partially with and partially without the use of these cookies. We followed campaigns for a food brand, a travel brand, two car brands, including [Renault](#), and finally a campaign for [Exterioo Tuinmeubelen](#) (garden furniture) via [AdSomeNoise](#). We will specifically highlight the latter two later in this chapter.

Before we go in-depth for Renault and Exterioo, we will first look into the overarching results of all the participating campaigns. We studied the differences in performance regarding the view-through and click-through rates. Overall we notice that people who have not consented, and therefore are shown the commercial without cookies, tend to completely view the video more often. People who are shown the commercials based on cookies on the other hand, are more prone to click through to the website.



These results are based on campaigns that were served within the Ster network. However, we see comparable results outside of the Ster network, as well. Exterioo, for instance, ran a campaign without cookies with Ster via AdSomeNoise. They ran the same campaign with cookie data outside of the Ster network through programmatic. Looking at these campaigns, we see the following results: the campaign with cookies generated more clicks and the campaign without cookies is more often viewed to completion.

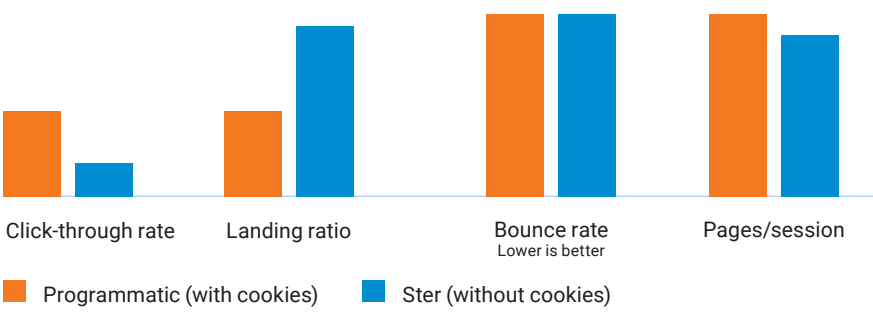


However, these results tell us nothing about how the campaign is performing in terms of conversion and the behaviour on the website itself: after all, a higher click-through rate does not necessarily mean more conversions. In order to gain better insight into this, we will dive deeper into the results from Exterioo and take a look at data we conducted together with Annelect, a data analysis agency, for the Renault campaign.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE BEHAVIOUR ON THE LANDING PAGE?

In order to determine the quality of the click, we need to look into the behaviour on the landing page. We will examine the landing ratio, the bounce rate and the number of pages per session for both campaigns. We will first dive into Exterioroo's campaign results. Here we notice that – despite the higher click-through rate in the programmatic part – the landing ratio is higher on the campaign through the Ster network. Once on the website, we see that the bounce rate and the number of pages per session are equal for both routes.

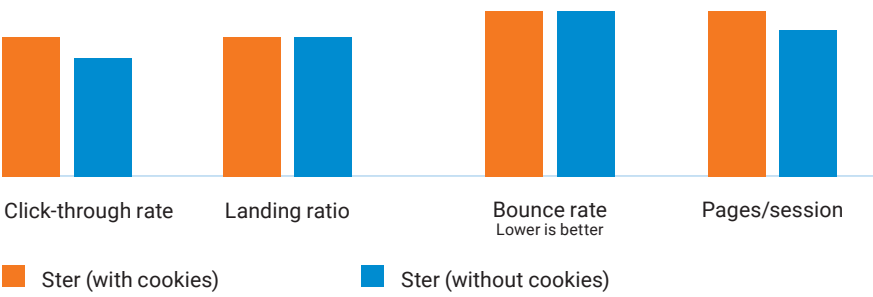
RESULTS CAMPAIGN EXTERIOO



It would appear that the campaign through the Ster network has led to a higher number of conscious clicks compared to the programmatic-campaign. The quality of the clicks on the website is equally high. So, whether the campaign is served through the Ster network without cookies or programmatically with cookies, the end results are comparable.

However, these results are likely not solely due to the use of cookies or the lack in doing so; it is possible that the difference in networks also plays a part. To further investigate the role of (not) using cookies in video campaigns, we will take a closer look at the campaign for Renault. This campaign only ran through the Ster network. Here we also noticed that the click-through rate was higher for the route with cookies, but that – once people were on the website – the quality of the behavior on the landing page is just as good: the number of people that actually arrive on the website after they clicked on the campaign is the same and the amount that subsequently clicks through to other pages is similar for both routes as well.

RESULTS CAMPAIGN RENAULT

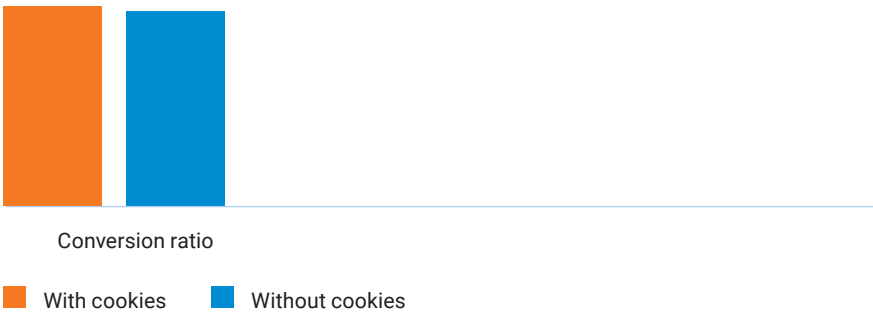


WHAT DOES IT ULTIMATELY YIELD?

The goal of the Renault campaign was to generate conversion. One of the objectives was for visitors to create a customized car using the online car configurator. So in order to measure the conversion of the campaign, the use of this configurator after clicking on the online video commercial was compared between the two routes. The result? The online video commercial without cookies held its own against the online video commercial with cookies:

In the case of online video, running a campaign without advertising cookies is therefore equally effective at generating clicks or conversions as a campaign based on personal data. Considering all these results, the question arises what added value there still is to using advertising cookies. In light of the changes in the market and technology, and a growing awareness among consumers, this seems to be the perfect moment to consider a change in thinking and media buying.

ATTRIBUTION-ANALYSIS: RENAULT



A smiling man with a beard and tattoos, wearing a striped shirt, is sitting at a desk. In front of him is a laptop and a container with colorful pens. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

4. TARGETED ADVERTISING AN ALTERNATIVE WITHOUT PERSONAL DATA

In conclusion, online advertising without cookies can be at least as effective as with cookies. However, with cookies it is possible to target commercials based on personal data. Since many brands prefer to target as narrowly as possible, this appears to be a valuable feature. However, at Ster targeted advertising is also possible *without* the use of personal data, thus respecting the visitor's privacy. How do we do this?

The answer to this question is: **contextual targeting**. With our method of contextual targeting it remains possible to place commercials relevantly without cookies. Contextual targeting in general is gaining interest internationally as well. The New York Times, for example, has successfully embraced contextual targeting: [the newspaper saw its revenue rise](#). Ster's method of contextual targeting is also proving its success with a significant online turnover increase of fifty percent compared to the first quarter of 2019.

HOW DOES CONTEXTUAL TARGETING AT STER WORK?

Since 2019, Ster offers a specific form of contextual targeting: your campaign is served in the right context based on the exact content alongside which your commercial will be shown.

To do this, we analyse the subtitles generated by Teletext page 888 in order to determine the exact topics that are discussed in the online video content. We are then able to match that content to one of our context channels. We have created

[over twenty separate context channels](#), such as the 'Holiday and travel' channel.

Due to this precise analysis, this channel is not limited solely to travel programmes, but can also include specific episodes of talk shows or other programmes that happen to address holiday or travel. The guests who appear in the (talk) show episode(s) are also taken into account in the analysis.

With this more accurate method of contextual targeting, a talk show such as **Op1** therefore no longer only belongs to the context channel 'News and current affairs', but is also matched to the context channels that fit the topic(s) discussed at the table in the specific episode. On one occasion this might for instance be politics and on another it might be health. In The Netherlands, Ster is unique with this specific form of targeting based on video content. For display advertising, we offer a similar precise way of contextual targeting: here, the context is determined by analysing the text on a webpage, which is then grouped into one of our context channels.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CONTEXTUAL TARGETING FOR YOUR BRAND?

In addition to you being able to carry out targeted advertising without using the personal data of your clients, placing commercials based on context has other advantages: running your advertisements around relevant and high quality content, for instance, has a positive effect on your campaign. Your target group is more likely to pay attention to ads that are shown around content that they like. As a result, the conversion of your campaign will benefit (Ster, [Online beleving](#))⁷.

⁷ www.ster.nl/onderzoek/whitepaper-online-beleving/

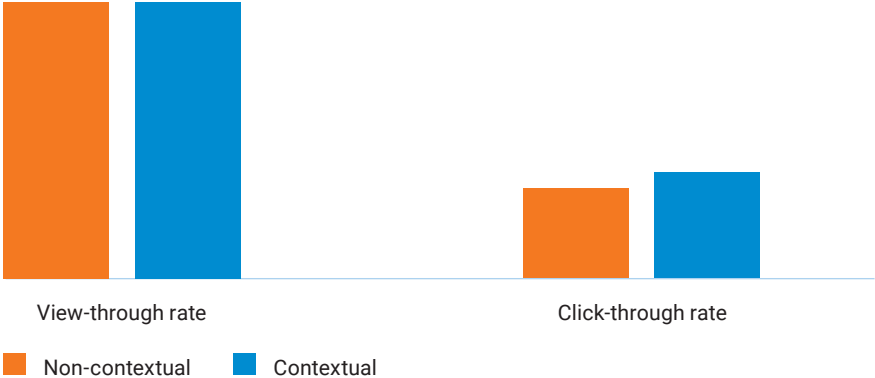
HOW DOES A CONTEXTUAL CAMPAIGN PERFORM COMPARED TO A NON-CONTEXTUAL CAMPAIGN?

In order to ascertain this, we compared the results of the campaigns for a number of advertisers within the food, car and travel industry, including a campaign from [Holland America Line](#). These campaigns were in part placed throughout the entire Ster network and for the other part placed with contextual targeting in the relevant context. For Holland America Line, the logical connection was the context channel 'Holiday and travel' and for the food brand this was 'Food and cooking'.

For the analysis, we researched to what extent the campaigns were capable of generating brand awareness. To do so, we looked at the percentage of visitors that watched the video to the end. In addition, we examined which type of targeting worked best in generating traffic to the website.

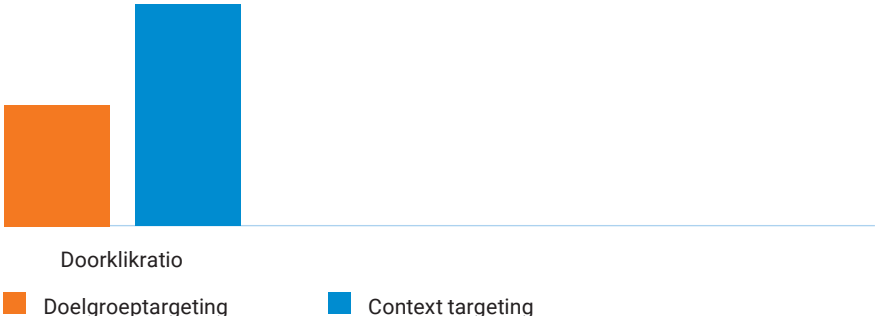
In the data of these three campaigns, we saw that the placement throughout the entire network results in high view-through rates. These are slightly higher compared to the more specific contextual targeting. Running a campaign throughout the entire network would therefore be particularly effective if the goal of your ad is to get a specific message across.

A possible explanation for the difference in view-through rates between the two routes lies in the click-through rate: when the video is served alongside relevant content that fits the commercial, people may be more inclined to click through to the website for more information. This means the video will be viewed to the end a little less often, but on the other hand will stimulate traffic to your website.



We noticed the same effect with [a previous campaign by another travel industry brand, Eliza Was Here](#). In that case, we saw that a campaign that was served based on contextual targeting had a higher click-through rate than a comparable campaign that was delivered based on audience group targeting. By choosing the relevant context, the click-through rate for the contextual campaign was almost twice as high compared to the audience group campaign. Therefore, contextual targeting can be the right choice when traffic is your objective.

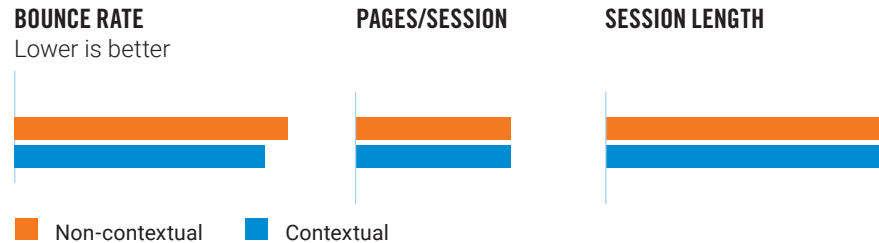
ELIZA WAS HERE



IS THERE A DIFFERENCE IN QUALITY BETWEEN CONTEXTUAL AND NON-CONTEXTUAL?

As we stated earlier in the analysis for Renault, the click-through rate does not necessarily say anything about the quality of the click. That is why we need to look further into the quality and the behaviour of the audience that clicks through to the website. The generated data do not show large differences in bounce rate, the number of pages people visit and the session length. Therefore, we can say that the quality of the traffic is equally as good for a campaign based on contextual targeting as for a campaign without contextual targeting.

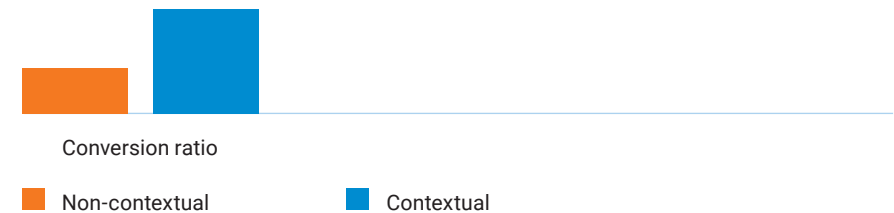
VISITOR STATISTICS: HOLLAND AMERICA LINE



WHAT IS THE EFFECT ON CONVERSION?

In order to answer this question, Annalect has analysed which route had the biggest effect on conversion in the case of the Holland America Line campaign. In this specific campaign, conversion meant that the visitor would view more information on the brand's website. The analysis shows that the campaign that was served based on contextual targeting had a bigger effect on this than the non-contextual campaign had. The ultimate campaign results can thus benefit from exposure around the relevant context.

ATTRIBUTION-ANALYSIS: HOLLAND AMERICA LINE



A man with curly hair and a beard, wearing a light blue shirt and a denim jacket, is sitting on a couch and smiling. He is wearing white earbuds. A woman with blonde hair tied in a bun, wearing a blue denim jacket, is lying down on the couch, looking up. The background shows a large window with a view of greenery outside.

ARE YOU READY FOR A FUTURE WITHOUT ADVERTISING COOKIES?



With the implementation of the GDPR, the online advertising world has received a massive wakeup call: advertising based on personal data may no longer be possible in the near future. Ster has proven that brands may approach this future with peace of mind: there are no great differences in the click behaviour, landing ratio, the quality of the clicks and the effect on conversion between campaigns based on advertising cookies and campaigns that are not using these cookies. Your online video or display campaign can therefore still be equally effective and of high quality without you using personal data. In addition, you are also able to ensure the privacy of the visitor in this way.

And if you want to target more narrowly? Even without cookies it is perfectly possible to target commercials specifically. With our precise method of contextual advertising, your campaign will run with targeting based on the exact content of an online text or video. Since the relevance and quality of the content alongside which your commercial is shown also influence the effectiveness of your campaign, this method of targeting provides value for your brand.

Ster can help you make the transition to advertising without cookies. Are you interested in finding out more about the (online) possibilities for your brand? Or how your campaign can benefit from the right context? Then please [contact](#) us!

"We believe many agencies and advertisers overestimate (cookie) data and that Umfeld and context are too little regarded. The results generated at Ster/the NPO substantiate this assumption and show that a high quality Umfeld is of great importance."

Boudewijn de Jong, [Pink Marketing](#) (digitaal marketingbureau for DPG/Krant.nl)

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Autoriteit persoonsgegevens, AP: Veel websites vragen op onjuiste wijze toestemming voor plaatsen tracking cookies, 2019

DDMA Privacy Monitor 2019

Digiday: After GDPR, The New York Times cut off ad exchanges in Europe – and kept growing ad revenue, 2019

Statcounter: Browser Market Share Netherlands, April 2020

Ster: Online beleving, 2019

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