



5 tips on how to work around tracking preventions

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Executive summary

In 2021 we were introduced to two tracking prevention measures that have had a tremendous impact on the data tracking of your ads. These two tracking measures are Apple's update iOS14.5 and the EU's 2021 cookie consent. The scary thing is that it's about 96% of all Apple users that decline tracking of their data. And since half of the population globally are iPhone users, this will impact a lot of your traffic.

For you, as an advertiser, this mainly affects three areas: tracking, targeting, and ad delivery. Among other things, your ads can have a harder time exiting the learning phase because of the lack of data. So, what now?

There are still tactics you can use to work around tracking preventions.

As an ads specialist, you can:

- optimize higher in the funnel
- use your on-platform data for retargeting
- consolidate your ad sets

You also have two other options but they require more expert technical knowledge from an IT department or an external provider.

You can:

- Implement Facebook's conversion API
- Get Server Side Tracking

Introduction

There's no doubt that the work for advertisers and social media specialists is getting harder and harder. Not only do you need to be able to come up with the ads, test them, optimize them, and make reports with results. Now you need to figure out how to make up for all the lost data you've been limited to by the tracking prevention measures.

In this guide, you'll read what the tracking preventions are, their implications, and, more importantly, what you can do to work around them.

You'll read mostly about Facebook as an example for social media platforms, but it's not limited to only Facebook. Similar implications and tactics can be used for LinkedIn and other social media platforms as well.

Let's dive into it!

What are tracking prevention measures

By this point (2021), we know about four primary tracking prevention measures causing data loss to various degrees.

The most common tracking prevention measures that we've known for ages are Adblockers and ITP for Safari browsers. Those two preventions limited the data we could receive by a bit, but it was still within manageable boundaries.

On the other hand, the two measures that influenced data tracking by a significant amount are the iOS14.5 update on Apple devices, introduced in May 2021, and, especially for companies advertising in EU countries, it's the new cookie consent law introduced in July 2021. So let's unpack the significance of those two measures in detail.



What's the iOS 14 update?

The iOS 14.5 update was introduced to all Apple devices and started rolling out in May 2021. They claimed that their users didn't want to be tracked, so they decided to roll out a new feature that would make tracking mostly impossible. It's presented as a popup that will ask their users if they want to be tracked.

96% of all Apple users decline the tracking of all unnecessary cookies. So for all these users, there is no tracking. There's not even tracking on your website in Google Analytics.

As a response, Facebook was forced to change its advertising platform to extreme measures. Unfortunately, most people misunderstood this action and thought they would get fewer ads which is not the case. Instead, you'll receive the same amount of ads, but they'll just be less suited to you as a user because advertisers have limited data to base their targeting on.

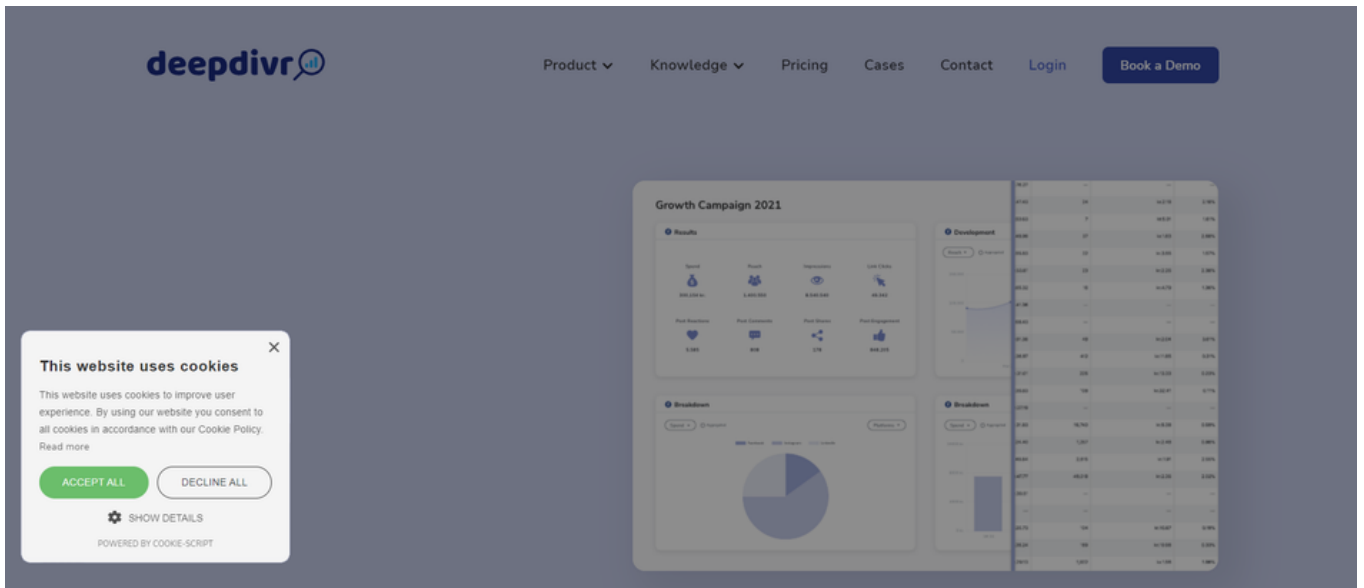
What are the implications?

When users decline tracking and they leave Facebook or Instagram, you will get a very limited amount of data to work with. In more specific terms, the data you have available now is highly restricted. Some metrics are aggregated, and it's severely delayed - up to 48 hours and up to 7 days for your conversions.

Going down the funnel, you'll notice that your retargeting audiences have decreased. And by what rate? It depends on who your target audience is. For example, if most of your traffic comes from desktop users, your situation is not as critical. Not yet, for the very least.

Last but not least, your pixel events on Facebook are now limited to 8 events per domain that you need to select yourself. To compare, you have around 40 standard events on Facebook.

As if the situation hasn't been dire enough for marketers, Android announced they will roll out a similar update for their users at the beginning of 2022.



2021 EU law for cookie consent

The EU pushed a new law on July 6th, 2021, that affects desktop users as well, and what it means is that users have to allow cookies on Facebook. All users are asked to choose between two options, to enable all cookies or deny them all.

What are the implications?

Facebook announced that the new cookie consent would result in decreased performance for companies advertising in the EU. However, since it's a process that unfolds gradually in a span of several months, the full impact is not noticeable immediately.

To put numbers to this, 96% of all Apple users decline the tracking, which on a Danish market represents 57% (September 2021), and it's about 50% of users worldwide. Furthermore, according to Piper Sandler, more than 87% of teens own an iPhone. So, if your target audience is teens, then, well, hang in there.

It's a lot of data that you're losing. And it's not only the data from Facebook. It's also the data you can see in your Google Analytics. So it will look like you're not getting any traffic from your social media, which is not the case, but that's how it is. That's how you'll have to tell your clients, colleagues, managers, and anyone interested in numbers you bring from social media.

What areas of advertising are affected?

These tracking prevention measures are primarily affecting three areas: tracking, targeting, and ads delivery. Of course, these areas are closely tied together, but let's keep them separated for the sake of a simpler explanation.



Tracking

Very simply, besides being restricted to the number of events you can track using the Facebook pixel, you can track way fewer conversions.

Almost all advertisers can see a drop in their conversions, which doesn't mean the conversions aren't there. You just can't track them. It's happening even though Facebook is doing its best to model data to provide as accurate results as possible. You're also unable to see the data about who converted. (demographics etc.)



Targeting

The size of your retargeted audience and target groups decreased. This is because all the users that denied tracking are not included in your target group anymore.

As this is happening gradually, there may not be a visible change in numbers yet, but you need to keep an eye on your website's retargeting audience as more users will decline to be tracked.



Ad delivery

Many marketers are reporting that it has become increasingly more difficult to have their ads exit the learning phase than before. There are a variety of reasons why it's happening.

One reason is linked to the targeting - target groups are getting smaller.

Another reason is related to the pixel events and the objectives you selected. It means that primarily you'll see a decline in ad delivery if you're optimizing for conversions and traffic.

The broad targeting has been influenced by those restrictions as well, which can be a bit surprising to understand why. When you're using broad targeting, you're using Facebook's data. Let's assume you're targeting someone interested in dogs. Facebook bases a lot of information about people from websites they visit, and the pixels on those websites. If a person in your target group for dogs visited many dog websites, Facebook would put that person into this interest category. And now, since many users decline tracking Facebook has limited data to work with. This limited pixel data can now impact your broad targeting, and the algorithm can have a harder time finding the people who are interested in your ads.

What can you do?

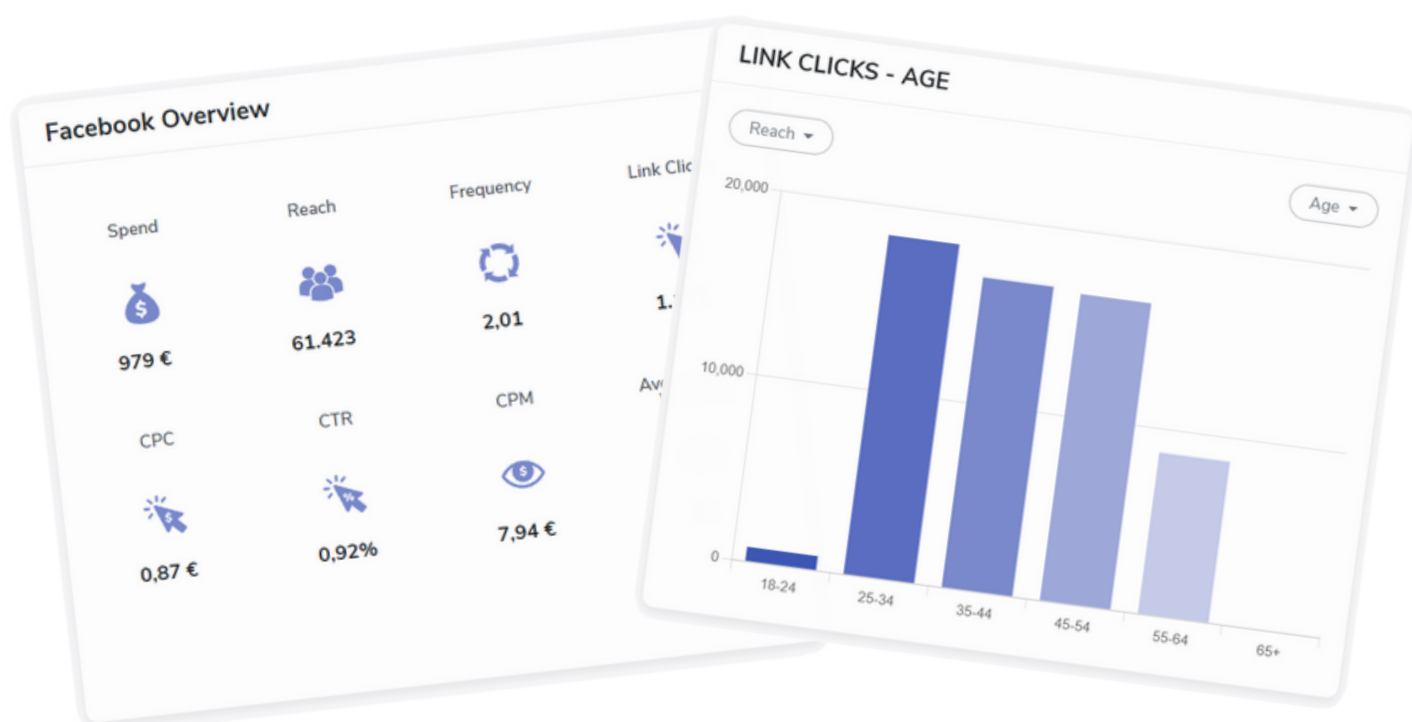
Even though the situation sounds dire, there are still things you can do to mitigate the data loss coming from tracking prevention measures. We can split them into two categories. The first category includes steps you can do today by yourself as a social media specialist. For the second category, you'll most likely need support from an IT specialist and an external provider for fetching your data.

What can you do today to mitigate the data loss?

There are three possibilities you can consider in your quest to get better results for your ads.

If you've seen that your ads have a hard time exiting the learning phase or delivering the results that you've asked for, you can consider optimizing higher in the funnel. Your other option is to retarget based on your on-platform data, and the last but not least option is to consolidate your data.

Let's dive deeper into all three options and how you can actually work with them.



Optimizing higher in the funnel

If you've previously optimized your ads for landing page views, you can consider optimizing for link clicks instead. But, of course, if you don't see any worse performance in your page views optimized campaigns, there is no reason to do so.

If you're optimizing for conversions, you need to remember that you need at least 50 conversions per ad, preferably more, per week for your ad to exit the learning phase. So, for example, if you previously optimized your ads for signups on your website and you're unable to get 50+ signups per week, consider optimizing for page views instead.

Similar can be applied when you're optimizing for purchases. For example, if you can't get at least 50 purchases per week, you can optimize your ad for add-to-basket.

You can use it as your rule of thumb. If your ads can't get at least 50 conversions (events) per week, then you'd simply get more out of your ads by optimizing higher in the funnel.

Retarget based on your on-platform data

There are several ways you can work with your on-platform data (data on Facebook), and some of them can be more relevant to you than others. Here are some of the most likely cases you can practically use.



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Video retargeting

You can retarget based on your video views. Based on the length of your video, you can retarget people that have seen 3 secs, 10 secs, 25%, etc. You can get a pretty good feeling of whether people were interested in your product, service, or brand, for example, by simply retargeting those who viewed at least 50% of your video. It doesn't have to be only one video. You can combine several of your videos into one category and retarget based on that.

This approach to video retargeting is (or has been) commonly used mainly in the upper funnel, but it can be used in both middle and lower funnel activities as well.

Retargeting based on interaction

As mentioned earlier, since the target audiences are getting smaller, it can be too specific to retarget only based on website traffic, which is what is mostly used. Targeting those who engage with your page or content can be a good alternative. You can do the same on Instagram, which you can tie to Facebook for even better results. For example, if you have a good community on Instagram that is active and interacting a lot with your brand, you can use that in your retargeting ads across Facebook and Instagram.

Retargeting based on lead forms and instant experience

If you set up a lead ad, you can, of course, get a lot of conversions (for example, newsletter signups) with the ad itself, but there is something more you can get out of it. Everyone who clicked on the ad and opened the lead form, regardless of whether they signed up or not, can be used for retargeting.

Similar can be done for the instant experience. If you haven't used instant experience before, it's a way for you to create an ad that will open a mini-website, but it's still on Facebook. You can have different videos, images, and CTAs within one instant experience ad, and people can scroll through it. Much like with lead forms, you can retarget everyone who simply opened the instant experience.

(Tip: Unlike traditional ads, where you can have only one CTA with instant experience, you don't have to choose to either show the instant experience (a mini website that FB generates) or link to your own website. You can do both.)

Consolidating target groups or ads sets

Let's use this setup as an example. You have in one campaign two lookalike ad sets, three retargeting ad sets, and three different ad sets with broad retargeting.

Campaign	
From	To
Ad set: Lookalike 1% web	Ad set: Lookalike
Ad set: Lookalike 3% video	
Ad set: Retargeting web	Ad set: Retargeting
Ad set: Retargeting interactions	
Ad set: Retargeting Lead ads	
Ad set: Broad interest A	Ad set: Broad
Ad set: Broad interest B	
Ad set: Broad interest C	

Consolidating your ad sets into one is a viable solution when your separated ad sets are simply not delivering results for you. You need to keep in mind your objectives and what kind of data you want to get from your ad.

The downside of consolidating your different ad sets into one for lookalike, one for retargeting, and one for broad targeting is that you won't get much information about how those ad sets perform individually. Let's say in your retargeting ad sets, you got 10 conversions on one, 200 on the next, and 100 on your last one. After consolidating, you won't be able to tell that those 200 actually came from your website retargeting, and the 100 are based on your lead ads. When you consolidate all three in one, you'll see results for all three combined.

In terms of only ad delivery, consolidating can be an excellent way to go. However, if you need more specific data, like which ad set is getting the most results, you can look further into split testing.

What you can do but it requires more resources

Your first option, which is one of the more complicated options because it requires some technical knowledge, is implementing Facebook's conversion API. The implementation of FB's API will give you, on average, 22% more data. It's just more challenging to implement this than FB's pixel.

Your second option is server side tracking.

Server Side Tracking

The average number of people that reject cookies is around 30%. Some companies experienced 60% data loss and some only 10%. It appears that the more compliant you are (you're following all the cookie rules), the more data you lose, and this is where server side tracking steps in.

Server side tracking is a relatively new method (2021) that came out as a response to the new cookie consent rules. Currently, the easiest way to use it is to outsource this service to companies that have developed this process and are selling it.

In general, server side tracking works based on an anonymization process. From the moment someone rejects your cookies, that visit becomes 100% anonymous. In the process, several anonymous visits are getting stitched into what we can refer to as a session. Then your server side tracking provider sends back that anonymized session to your Google Analytics, which you can define as legally anonymous.

It means that if hackers would try to match any individual piece of information, they wouldn't be able to identify any individual.

Afterward, you'll receive your recaptured primary data from the anonymization process to your Google Analytics, where you can define it as an anonymous segment. In a sense, you'll have two types of segments, one that is anonymous and the other that has been consented. (when your visitor accepted tracking cookies)

You can compare these two types of segments against each other to see the actual level of your traffic on your website.

There are other benefits (extending the lifetime of your cookies, identifying dropouts within the sales funnel, etc.), but you'll have to check for that with your server side tracking provider.

About deepdivr

Our mission is to enable our customers to unlock the potential of data and gain the insights that lie within, so they can make informed decisions that move their businesses forward.

We offer a powerful yet seamless analytics platform that makes the complex simple. Seen through our objective lens, users get an easy, uncluttered view of their data – enabling them to see the bigger picture and make impactful changes.



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Need more data?

You've read a lot of information and tips about how to work around tracking preventions, which can be overwhelming. Not only do you need to adapt to a new strategic approach for optimizing your ads with all these tracking preventions, but you also need to make sense out of the data that you'll collect.

To help you with that, you can get a free report for one of your campaigns and a session where we'll talk you through some of the more specific actions you can take.

Feel free to reach out to mikkel@deepdivr.io, and we'll take it from there.

