Google's Topics API Announcement
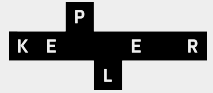
Marketing Systems Strategy Team – Flash POV

Last week, Google proposed a new **Topics API** as part of the ongoing Privacy Sandbox initiative, a privacy-friendly method to preserve targeted advertising without third-party cookies. This proposal replaces **FLoC,** which was shelved after testing and feedback from regulators and industry partners. Topics API is intended to **enable user-level targeting with a focus on privacy** by processing and sharing less information with advertisers than current cookie-based capabilities.

Topics **collects interests from Chrome users** based on browsing history **privately, on their device**, and shares those Topics —examples include "Fitness" and "Billiards"— instead of user IDs, to **facilitate privacy-conscious ad personalization**. To protect user privacy, the initial proposal calls for five Topics to be generated weekly based on a user's activity; then to share three Topics to each participating Publisher to further improve the anonymity of an individual's Topics signal.

	Short Term Impact	Long Term Impact

Users	• **Much greater visibility and control over how you can be targeted**
	  ○ Taxonomy is clear to users and excludes sensitive subjects
	  ○ Browsing data persists for 3 weeks and can be edited
		• **Configuration and usability remains unclear**
		  ○ About half of web traffic in the US uses Chrome so it's not valuable to all users
		  ○ Users may need to manage Topics within each device adoption more difficult, and these tools are still under development

Publishers	• **Content categories are more generalized than FLoC and other industry taxonomies**
	  ○ In initial launch, ~350 topics to be included, but expected to grow (FLoC had ~32k cohorts)
	  ○ Publishers must adopt API; adoption will take time to scale
		• **Domain-level topic generation could pose challenges for sites with lots of content**
		  ○ Topics generated at the domain level rather than the page level - so "finance.newssite.com" may be understood as *Finance*, while "newssite.com/finance" falls under its more general grouping, *News*
		  ○ Long-term management of the taxonomy is still unclear

Advertisers	• **Preserves some targeting capabilities without third-party cookies**
	  ○ No immediate usability within buying platforms
	  ○ Testing to begin globally in 2022
		• **More work needed to integrate Topics into advertising ecosystem**
		  ○ Measurement and attribution approaches to Topics-based campaigns are in development
		  ○ How detailed can Topics become to make this more useful than traditional contextual targeting?

Key Open Questions

- Would/could other browsers adopt this framework?
- How will publishers be able to influence the Topics assigned to the content on their sites?
- Will this address regulator & user privacy concerns?
- Can advertisers implement frequency caps for Topics-based campaigns?

Additional Resources: Google Announcement   Technical Information   AdAge   AdExchanger