

# Rethinking audience strategy: A guide for brands

7 things marketers  
must do to maximize  
media impact



# Introduction

Data-driven marketing over the last few years has been like a creaky roller coaster combined with a zombie show. It's been a wildly unpredictable ride that leaves you feeling more than a bit queasy — and all along the way, the undead keep lurching at you.

Let's review how we got here, starting with what happened in 2024 alone: In January, Google turned off third-party cookies for roughly 1% of Chrome users worldwide — a major step after years of delays. (Google had first announced it would be phasing out cookies back in 2020.) Then April rolled along, and Google announced it was putting off full cookie deprecation again — until 2025. And then, of course, came the biggest shocker of all: In July, Google announced it wasn't going to kill off cookies after all. (The World Federation of Advertisers dubbed it a [“U-turn.”](#) A top agency executive told Ad Age, [“This just creates more chaos and uncertainty.”](#))

Google's *new* new plan? It would let Chrome users decide — allowing them to block cookies through a yet-to-be-unveiled preferences setting. Since Chrome dominates with about 65% of the global browser market share, third-party cookies — the seemingly unkillable zombies of digital marketing — might be finished after all; they'd just be picked off by millions of consumers rather than by Google.

All we had to do was wait and see how easy or hard Google would make it for Chrome users to opt out (or in).

But then... another (!) plot twist: [“Google must sell Chrome to restore competition in online search, DOJ argues,”](#) as Reuters reported in November.

Oh, and by the way: [“Forget Chrome—Google Starts Tracking All Your Devices In 8 Weeks,”](#) as Forbes reported in late December.

The adventure never ends, does it?

Which brings us to our first bit of advice for data-driven marketing in 2025:



# 1. Move on from the whole annoying post-cookie marketing conversation (for now)

So, yeah, cookies aren't going away — imminently at least — but given the deprecation drama of the past few years, it's become abundantly clear how inadequate and flawed they've been all along.

“When you think about it, the term ‘cookie’ in and of itself was an overstatement and a little disappointing, frankly,” says Josh Golden, CMO at Quad. “The word makes you think of fully baked, satisfying treats, but in reality, they’re more like random crumbs of information that lack context and can end up painting a false and confusing picture of a consumer.”

Which is why buying a one-off gift for a coworker's baby shower can lead marketers to think you just had a baby yourself. Or why, when you buy a paper shredder for your home office, you might end up getting inundated with digital ads nudging you to buy the very same paper shredder that you've already bought. (Cookie logic, so to speak, is that you're a paper-shredder enthusiast now.)

“The bottom line is that cookies are just about devices and databases talking to each other,” says Golden. “They can distract us from the big picture of what we're supposed to be doing as marketers, which is having smart, relevant conversations about satisfying consumer needs and desires.”



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—Josh Golden  
CMO at Quad



## 2. Make your data-driven marketing strategy people-focused, not device-centric

“At Quad and our agency Rise, we’ve been advising marketers to think less about cookies — whatever their fate may be — and instead focus on reaching people in 2025,” says Lily Wen, Director of Product Marketing – Data & Media at Quad. “This year is all about making your marketing people-centered.”

In other words, your audience strategy should focus on reaching specific human beings, not devices.

The Quad/Rise POV is that the best way to reach human beings is to start with where they live — literally.

A lot of marketing strategies make presumptions about where people metaphorically live — on certain devices, on specific platforms, etc. — but it turns out that many of the most relevant data points surround the household.

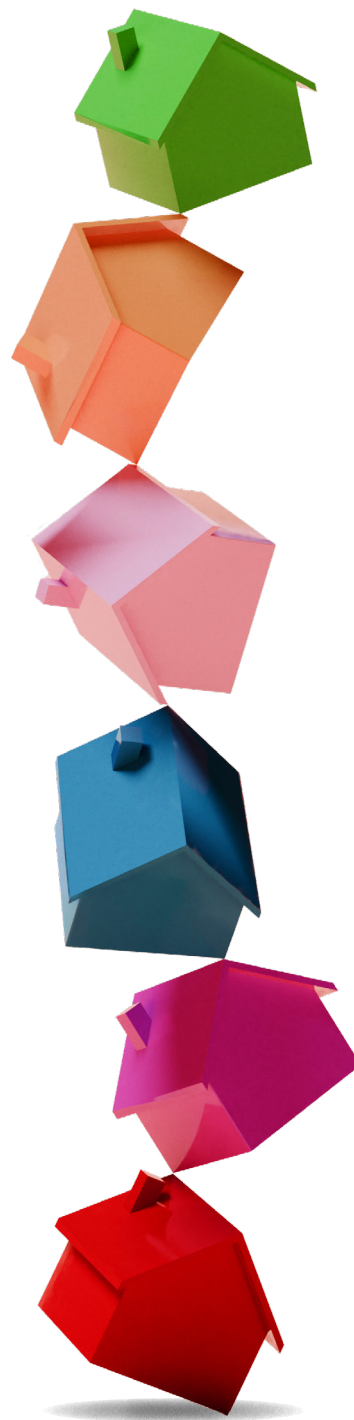
“You only have one place you call home — and home gives you real insight into people,” says Joshua Lowcock, President of Quad Media, who oversees operations at Rise. “If you tell me where someone lives, I can tell you a lot about them.”

The household serves as a core identifier where passions and interests can be connected to an individual consumer — and the types of physical mail that consumer receives is particularly illuminating.

“Consumers are not going to be paying to subscribe to fashion magazines if they’re not really interested in fashion,” says Aaron Horowitz, Vice President of Business Development at [Rise](#), a Quad agency. “Customers get on — and stay on — catalog mailing lists because of what they actually spend money on, whether it’s hiking gear or beauty products or kids’ clothing.”

Quad’s strategy is to start with information available at the household level and then match it with additional consumer data points gleaned from other channels, including digital and social, as well transactional activity. The sum is a more complete portrait of what consumers care about, how they act and where they can be reached.

The endgame for marketers? Household addressability for personalized omnichannel marketing, across both digital and physical touchpoints.



### 3. Get passionate about the marketing value of consumer passions

The data in Quad's data stack touches 92% of all U.S. households and 97% of the total U.S. adult population. By comparison, 68% of U.S. adults say they use Facebook even occasionally, [per the Pew Research Center](#). Across any given 18-month period, Quad's data stack contains more than 3 billion validated/revalidated data points to anchor addressability for any marketer targeting any consumer segment.

"Our data stack delivers on the usual parameters marketers care about, including demographic, behavioral and attitudinal data," says Quad's Wen, "but we're particularly excited about what we call 'passions.' We track a wide range of consumer passions — from cooking to reading books to home improvement."

With some exceptions, like travel, passions tend to be household-centric.

"Invariably, consumers spend real money to support, nurture and feed their passions," Wen adds. "And if you reach them with the right, relevant messaging, passionate consumers can become passionate brand advocates."

In other words, passions are about what consumers are actually choosing to do with their time and money.

"Successful marketers increasingly need to focus on consumer actions — not just attributes — to build quality audiences for their brands," says Marcus Lancaster, VP of Strategic Accounts, Quad.

#### Gain a more complete view of your consumers with Quad's data

**250M+**

U.S. Consumers

**121M+**

U.S. Households

**20K+**

Attributes and profile types including

#### ● DEMOGRAPHIC

- Age
- Income
- Education
- Adults in HH
- Principal shopper
- Spouse
- Households
- Head of household
- Occupation
- Employment
- Political affiliation

#### ● TRANSACTIONS

- Shopping**
  - Transactions
  - Brands
  - Merchants
  - Locations
  - Online vs. in store
- Telecom**
  - Phones & plans
  - Internet
- Finance**
  - Mortgage
  - Home equity
  - Credit card types
  - Credit card usage
  - Net worth
  - Auto

#### ● ATTITUDINAL

- Consumer confidence
- Buying styles
- Product opinions
- Social media
- Finance
- Health
- Sports
- Media
- Shopping

#### ● PASSIONS

- Home goods
- Home décor
- Lawn & garden
- Furniture
- Books
- Home improvement
- Baking
- Cooking

#### ● BEHAVIORAL

- Media**
  - Time spent
  - Recency/frequency
  - Apps
  - Print
  - Digital
  - Social
  - Cable/streaming
- Activities**
  - Travel
  - Live sporting events
  - Concert goers
  - Amusement parks
  - City goer
  - Rural living

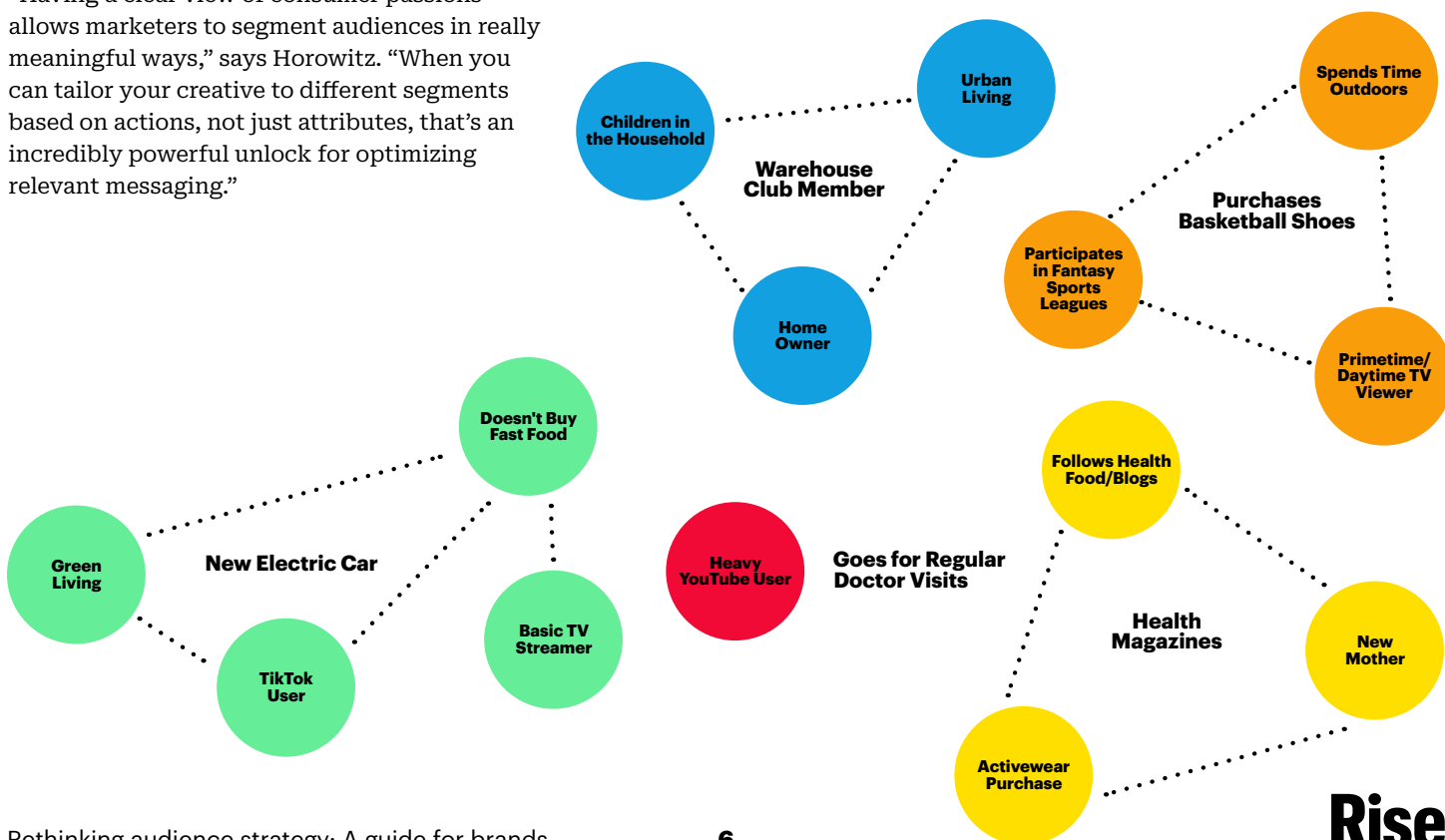
## 4. Take a holistic view of your consumers' journeys through connections planning

“Connections planning, at its core, is pairing up the right personalized messaging with the right audience based on where they are in the funnel,” says Dean Ferenac, SVP, Consumer Engagement, Connections Planning at Rise. The Rise approach is to map the consumer’s holistic decision journey, connecting messaging to their level of intent and showing content when and where they’re most receptive.

Receptivity to messaging circles back to passions — in life and in media. And so connections planning at Rise takes into account factors including:

- The social media platforms and other channels a consumer spends the most time on
- The purchases they already make and are most likely to make in the future
- Their affinity for different technologies

“Having a clear view of consumer passions allows marketers to segment audiences in really meaningful ways,” says Horowitz. “When you can tailor your creative to different segments based on actions, not just attributes, that’s an incredibly powerful unlock for optimizing relevant messaging.”



## 5. Embrace look-alike and predictive modeling, then test, test, test (and learn)

Part of the narrative surrounding data uncertainty over the past few years has been that marketers need to gather their own first-party and zero-party data. Which is, of course, great advice — but it has its limits.

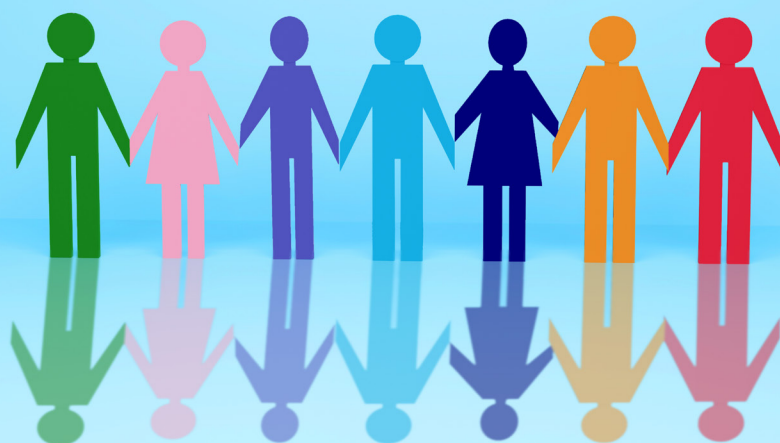
“Not every brand will be able to gather a true critical mass of their own customer data,” says Wen. “That’s where look-alike audiences and predictive modeling come in. Start with the first-party and zero-party data that you do have, and then extrapolate and build on that smartly and strategically.”

Among Rise’s capabilities: advanced testing of look-alike audiences, which involves assessing performance on customer lists across Google

and other platforms. Analyzing the behavior and engagement of your most valuable customers can reveal patterns and characteristics to create high-performing look-alike audiences.

Rise’s media optimization platform can compare look-alike performance across multiple platforms in real time. It enables agile, strategic decision-making for incremental growth, optimizing the use of our clients’ data while allowing them to target and retarget a niche audience with ease. It’s about making media accountable with advanced analytics.

“Doing performance analysis in real time means that marketers are essentially always testing and always learning,” says Wen.



## 6. Unlock the power of hyperlocal marketing

In addition to helping to surface and foreground consumer passions, household-centric data also naturally connects to neighborhood-level insights that help marketers with personalization.

“Most consumers do a majority of their shopping within a relatively small radius of their households,” says Horowitz. “Starting with the household and leveraging data surrounding the demographics of the neighborhood and the larger community can inform the relevance of an omnichannel marketing strategy that encompasses everything from out-of-home advertising to in-store retail media.”

Speaking of in-store retail media, [In-Store Connect by Quad](#) — which puts networked digital displays into regional grocery stores to give CPG marketers the ability to deliver highly relevant product-

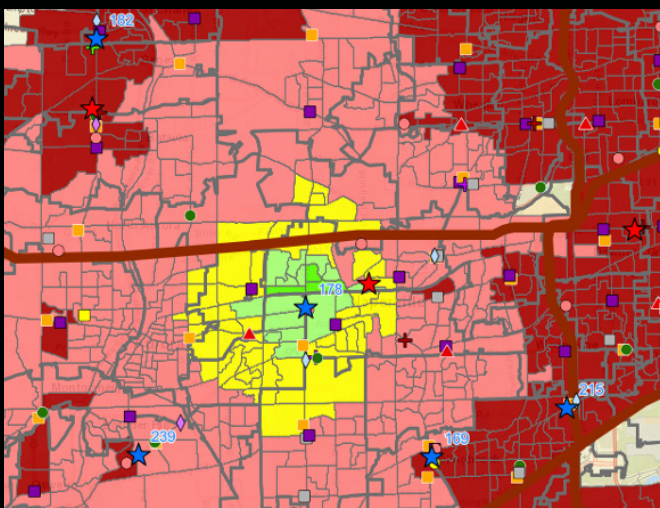
centric messaging to consumers when they’re ready to buy — is among the state-of-the-art platforms that can give marketers access to geographically targeted audiences.

“Imagine a consumer journey that includes a personalized direct mail piece promoting the availability of a new product at a local retailer, reinforcement of that messaging through a targeted social campaign, plus digital in-store messaging that promotes a retailer-specific discount offer,” says Wen. “Effective omnichannel strategy starts with robust, household-centered data and then zooms out to tactics that engage the customer along their non-linear path to purchase. Layering in hyperlocal data points can make the strategy that much more effective.”

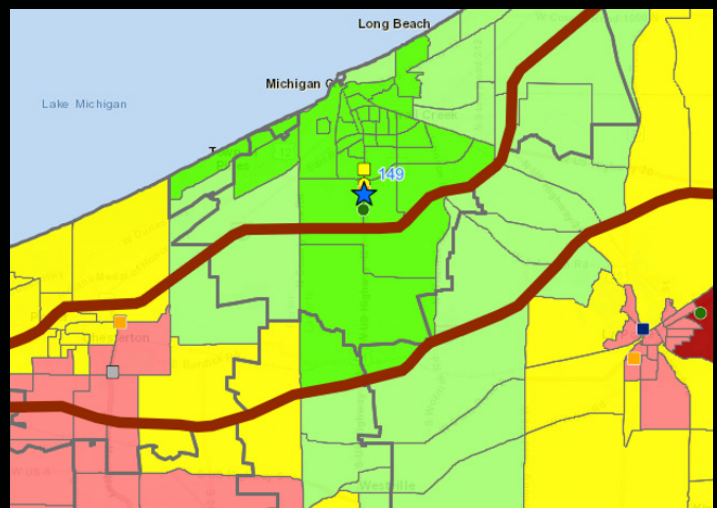
### A tale of two cities

Green (hot areas) indicates a greater probability of customers shopping.

#### Store A - highly competitive market



#### Store B - less competitive market



Probability    Greater than 50%    20%-50%    10%-20%    5%-10%    1%-5%    Less than 1%



## 7. Demand more data accuracy and transparency as a foundation for your campaigns

Another key advantage of household addressability is verifiability and resilience.

Unlike a lot of digital identifiers, household addresses are quite literally mapped to physical reality. The United States Postal Service is mandated to serve every American community, so it keeps an up-to-date database of household addresses. When people move, they typically fill out a USPS change-of-address request, and through its [NCOALink](#), the Postal Service maintains a secure dataset of approximately 160 million permanent change-of-address records as a single source of truth.

As it happens, Quad is one of the Postal Service's largest customers — again, our data stack touches 92% of all U.S. households and 97% of the total U.S. adult population — which means that we're constantly working with marketers to leverage NCOALink for cleaning and updating household address data.

And, again, starting with the household as the identifier provides a tangible, verifiable, resilient foundation on which to build a personalized marketing strategy.

“Understanding where people live and how they live — what they're passionate about, what they spend their money on — means that marketers can better activate against moments that matter in the consumer journey,” says Wen. “That's what makes household addressability so powerful.”

**92%**

of U.S. households touched by Quad's data stack

**97%**

of the U.S. adult population touched by Quad's data stack



# Let's continue the conversation

Marketers face increasingly complex challenges as they seek out optimal ways to reach their target consumer. Paired with conflicting media priorities and rising costs/inflation, they need partners who can help maximize marketing impact to their best audiences.

At Quad/Rise, we work with more than 2,700 brands across every imaginable vertical — from retail and CPG to health and financial services — helping marketers gain a single view of their consumers while truly understanding what's working and what's not. We can also help you:

- Eliminate duplicative media spend
- Decrease acquisition costs
- Increase transparency of media spend

Want to continue the conversation?  
Reach out at [MeetRise.com/contact-us](https://MeetRise.com/contact-us)

## About Rise

Rise, a Quad agency, is a full-service, full-funnel media agency built on insights from the most precise, proprietary data available. From top-of-funnel awareness to targeted digital posts or personalized pieces of physical mail, Rise is the media agency for marketers who want the precision and accountability of performance applied across every touchpoint, channel and objective.

With over \$6 billion in media buying power, Rise serves brands across all industries including retail, consumer packaged goods, healthcare and education. By prioritizing transparency, Rise manages media for clients with no hidden margins, spreads or commissions while providing complete visibility into everything they do.

As part of Quad, a global marketing experience company, Rise leverages a proprietary tech and data stack that provides brands with a telescopic view into the media touchpoints that change behavior and can transparently optimize their marketing spend to drive business growth. Learn more at [MeetRise.com](https://MeetRise.com).

**Rise** a Quad  
agency

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## About Quad

Quad (NYSE: QUAD) is a marketing experience, or MX, company that helps brands make direct consumer connections, from household to in-store to online. The company does this through its MX Solutions Suite, a comprehensive range of marketing and print services that seamlessly integrate creative, production and media solutions across online and offline channels. Supported by state-of-the-art technology and data-driven intelligence, Quad simplifies the complexities of marketing by removing friction wherever it occurs along the marketing journey. The company tailors its uniquely flexible, scalable and connected solutions to each clients' objectives, driving cost efficiencies, improving speed-to-market, strengthening marketing effectiveness and delivering value on client investments.

Quad employs more than 12,000 people in 14 countries and serves approximately 2,500 clients including industry leading blue-chip companies that serve both businesses and consumers in multiple industry verticals, with a particular focus on commerce, including retail, consumer packaged goods, and direct-to-consumer; financial services; and health. Quad is ranked among the largest agency companies in the U.S. by Ad Age, buoyed by its full-service media agency, [Rise](https://Rise.com), and creative agency, [Betty](https://Betty.com). Quad is also one of the largest commercial printers in North America, according to Printing Impressions.

For more information about Quad, including its commitment to operating responsibly, intentional innovation and values-driven culture, visit [quad.com](https://quad.com).