

# MARKETERS BELIEVE BRAND SAFETY IMPACTS THEIR RETURN ON INVESTMENT

*by Rich Sutton  
Chief Revenue Officer,  
Trusted Media Brands, Inc.*

*Babette Lazarus  
Senior Executive Director,  
Brand Insights  
Trusted Media Brands, Inc.*



## PARADIGM SHIFT: BRAND SAFETY IS NOW AN ESSENTIAL SUCCESS METRIC—9 IN 10 ARE TAKING STEPS TO MAKE BRAND SAFE MEDIA BUYS

The industry has been “discussing” brand safety for years. The YouTube incident earlier this year took the discussion to its loudest level yet. How important is brand safety? More than 75 percent of brand marketers believe brand safety impacts return on investment.

Trusted Media Brands recently conducted new research surveying 287 digital decision-makers among the Advertiser Perceptions Omnibus panel. This is the clearest indication yet of how critical brand safe environments are to brands.

## WHAT DEFINES BRAND SAFETY?

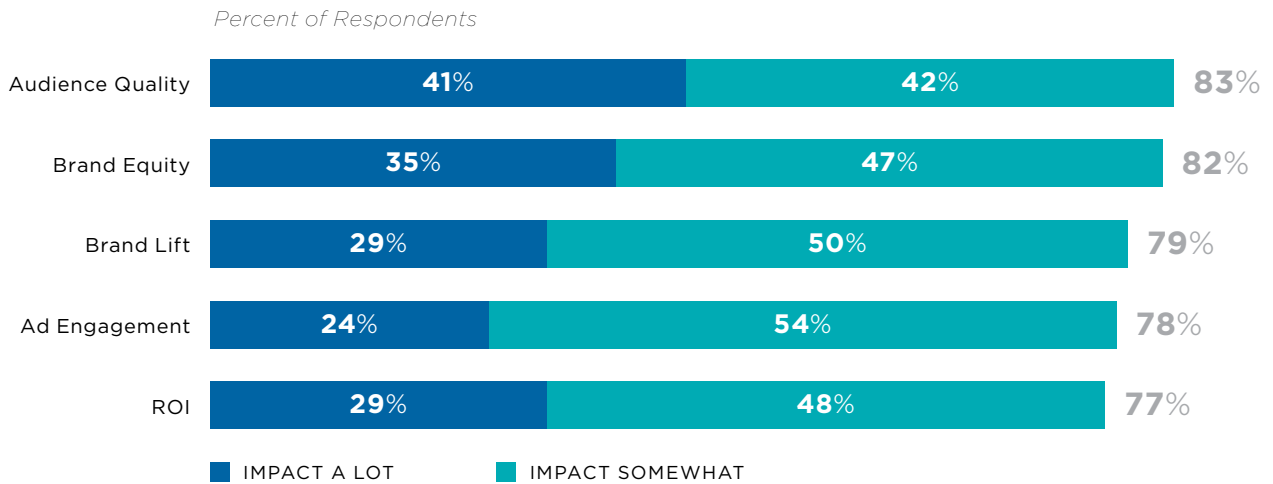
“ Clean content and images, nothing that would place a brand in a questionable spot or jeopardize the brand image.  
—Agency Buyer ”

“ An environment that is fundamentally friendly, that will not cause uncomfortable associations, or spur unwelcome sharing or comments.  
—Marketer/VP ”

**MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS BELIEVE BRAND SAFETY IMPACTS ROI**

The results of this research drive home the point that content matters and that placing ads in trusted, brand-safe environments is now at the forefront in digital planning, seen as essential to advertising effectiveness. Advertising in brand-safe environments is believed to drive significant impact on key measures such as audience quality (83 percent), brand equity (82 percent) and brand lift (79 percent). More than three-quarters of brand marketers surveyed believe brand safety impacts ROI (77 percent).

**AUDIENCE QUALITY IS IMPACTED MOST BY ADVERTISING IN A BRAND SAFE ENVIRONMENT AS WELL AS BRAND SUCCESS METRICS**



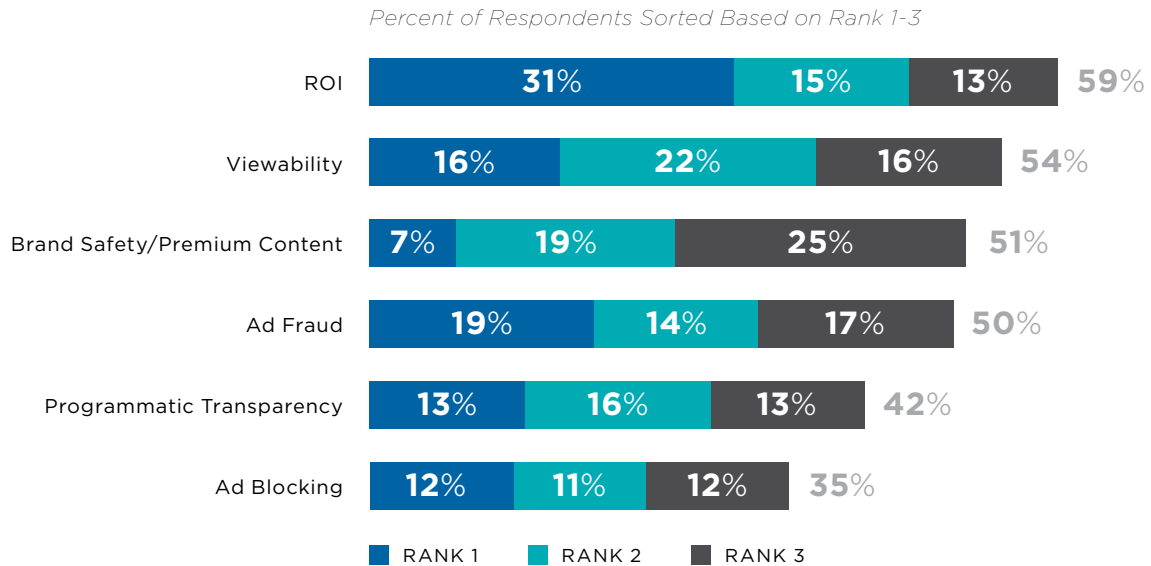
**Q.** In your opinion, to what degree are the following positively impacted by advertising in a brand safe environment?  
*Base: Involved in Digital/Mobile Advertising*

**IS THE ANXIETY OVER BRAND SAFETY ON THE WANE?**

Not by a long shot. With the YouTube boycott months behind us, some advertisers are back on the platform, persuaded by greater controls and use of third-party verification. In fact, spending on YouTube has remained fairly stable over the past year and any downward blip has been recovered, according to tracking from Media Radar. However, advertisers are still nervous.

When asked to rank the most concerning issues in digital media buying, marketers ranked brand safety in the top three among 51 percent, not far behind their premier concerns, ROI (59 percent) and viewability (54 percent).

**TOP CONCERNS INCLUDE ROI, VIEWABILITY AND BRAND SAFETY**



**Q.** Which of the following issues are you most concerned about when it comes to digital media buying? Rank up to three.  
*Base: Involved in Digital/Mobile Advertising*

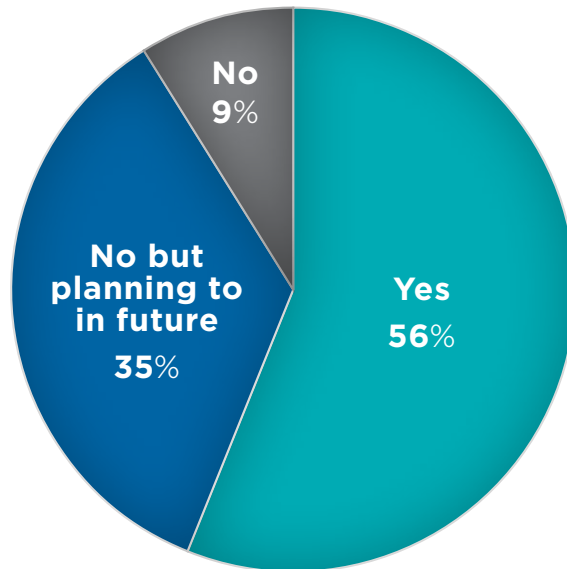
**NINE IN TEN ARE TAKING STEPS TO IMPROVE BRAND SAFETY**

When asked if they had made deliberate efforts to improve the brand safety of their digital media buys, 56 percent of digital advertisers said they have already (64 percent among agency respondents) and another 35 percent are planning to do so. Very few are not on the quest for brand safety.

**OVER HALF HAVE MADE DELIBERATE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE BRAND SAFETY OF THEIR DIGITAL MEDIA BUYS AND ANOTHER THIRD PLAN TO IN THE FUTURE**

*Percent of Respondents*

“  
We have a robust list of “rules of engagement” that clearly defines an unfavorable environment. It is centered around very specific content, keyword and types of sites.  
”  
—Marketing Director

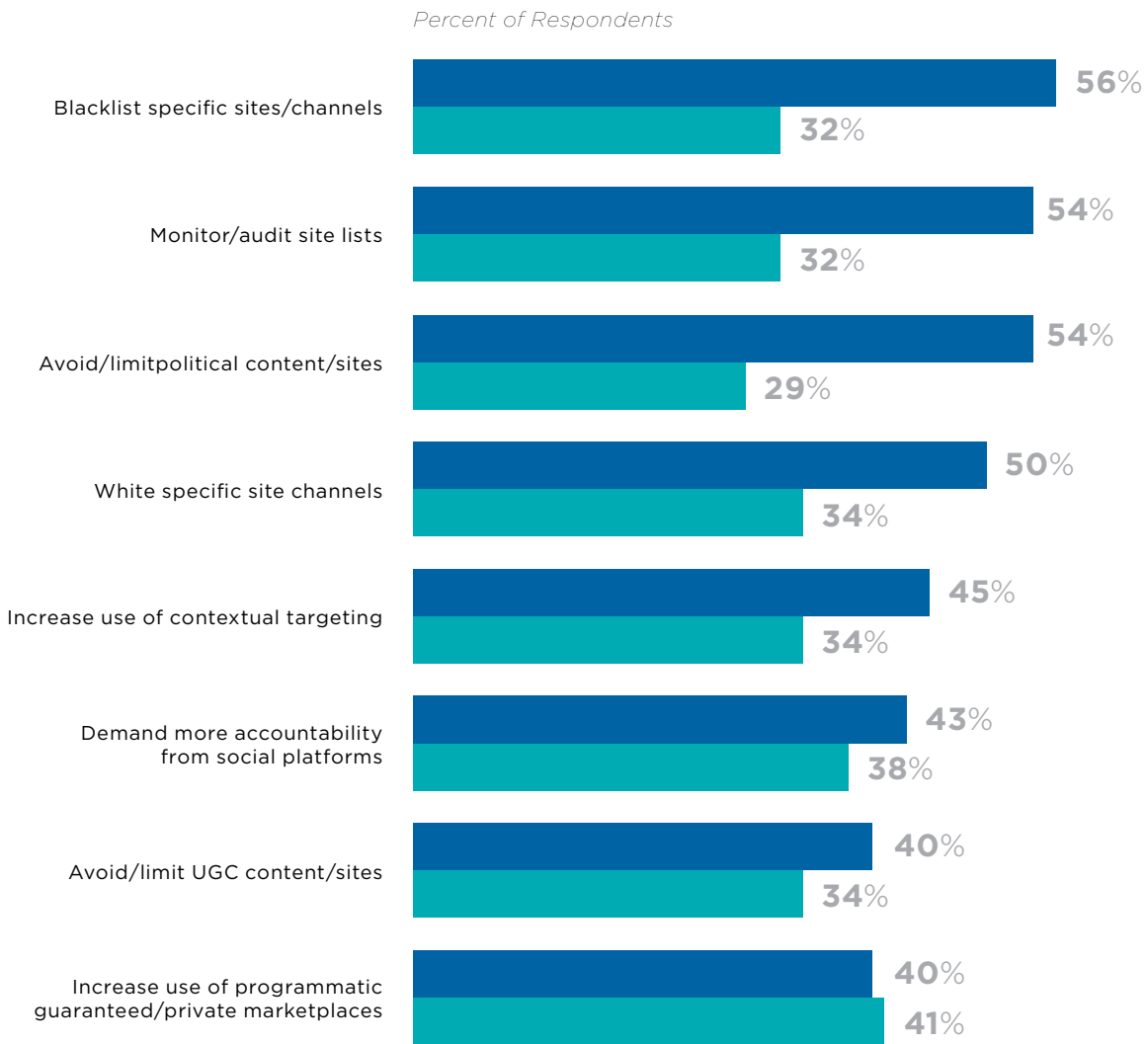


**Q.** Have you made deliberate efforts to improve the brand safety of your digital media buys?  
*Base: Involved in Digital/Mobile Advertising*

**ADVERTISERS AND MARKETERS ARE TAKING A HANDS-ON APPROACH**

The risk of placing ads near inflammatory content, hate speech or fake news has digital planners pouring over websites and making tough determinations. The most frequent tactic, put in place by more than half the respondents, revolves around blacklisting or whitelisting specific sites/channels, monitoring site lists and avoiding political content or sites. As a future remedy, four in ten (41 percent) plan to increase their use of programmatic guaranteed/private marketplaces.

**ADVERTISERS ARE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE ADDRESSED BRAND SAFETY BY EVALUATING INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES – BLACKLISTING, MONITORING, AND LIMITING POLITICAL CONTENT**



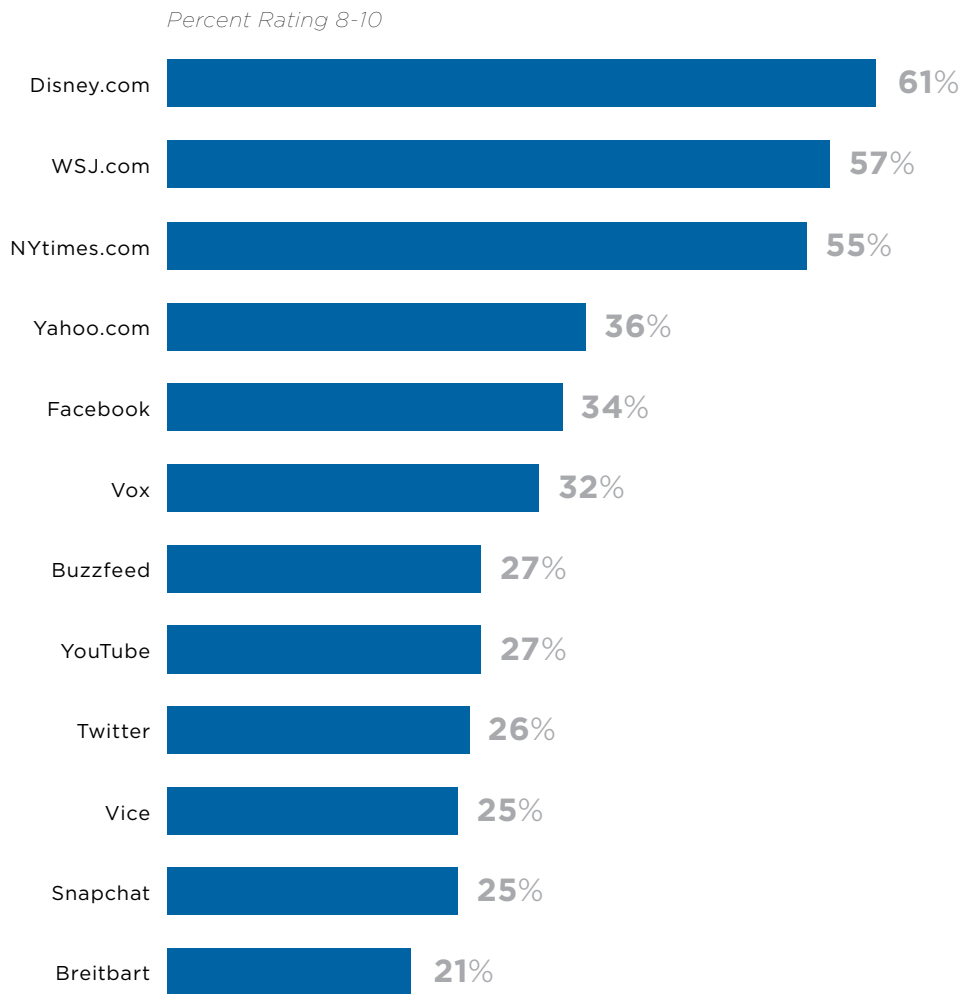
Q. Which, if any of the following steps have you already taken/plan to take to improve brand safety of your digital media buys?  
Base: Involved in Digital/Mobile Advertising

**SITES THAT CAN DELIVER TRUSTED CONTENT ARE AT A PREMIUM**

Fake news and the general democratization of digital content have squashed the public’s trust in media and advertisers know it. Study respondents describe brand-safe environments in terms of what the content is—or is not. Respected brand names now have increased value for both consumers and advertisers alike.

When asked to rate a list of selected websites for their ability to deliver a brand-safe environment, branded and news sites are viewed as most safe (average 58 percent), social sites less so (only one-third rate Facebook as brand safe (34 percent)) and 27 percent do so for YouTube (only 20 percent among agency respondents). BuzzFeed logs in at 27 percent and Breitbart lands at the bottom of the list (21 percent).

**BRANDED AND NEWS SITES OCCUPY A TOP TIER FOR BEING ABLE TO DELIVER A BRAND SAFE ENVIRONMENT**



**Q.** How would you rate the following sites/platforms for their ability to deliver a brand safe environment?  
(1 = Not At All Brand Safe; 10 = Extremely Brand Safe)

*Base: Involved in Digital/Mobile Advertising*

## THE CURRENT STATE OF BRAND SAFETY

- 1. Marketers believe that brand safety drives return on investment**
- 2. Nine in 10 marketers are taking steps** to improve brand safety
- 3. Online publishers that can deliver safe content are at a premium**
- 4. Brand safety is a top three concern** of marketers
- 5. Marketers are taking a “hands on” approach** to brand safety

**Clearly a new paradigm of performance measurement** is emerging for both marketers and their agencies that interlinks ROI, viewability and brand safety to determine a digital campaigns' effectiveness. Those publishers that can use existing and new tools that capture this new model will prevail as the digital landscape rapidly shifts away from “fake content” to brand-safe “clean content” environments.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Rich Sutton** is Chief Revenue Officer of Trusted Media Brands, Inc. Highly regarded and with proven success in digital media, Sutton has more than 30 years of experience in management, marketing, startups, turnarounds and working to grow world-class brands. He was recruited from The Daily Mail where he had also served as Chief Revenue Officer.

Previously, he was Senior Vice President of consumer markets at WebMD, where he tripled revenue to more than \$150 million per year and broadened the company's client base. Prior to joining WebMD, Sutton served as Senior Vice President for Warner Bros. Entertainment where he led digital media sales and client marketing for Warner Bros. Online for more than 13 years.

Sutton's work with brands has been recognized by Ad Age, Forbes, AAAA, and Adweek, among other industry publications, and online and marketing awards. He is the author of "Best Practices in Branded Entertainment" for the Association of National Advertisers, as well as several White Papers for Trusted Media Brands, including: "The Future of Digital Video" and "Can Video and Native Formats Rule Mobile Advertising?".

**Babette Lazarus** joined Trusted Media Brands, Inc. as Executive Director, Brand Insights in 2015. Bringing extensive experience in advertising and publishing, including senior research and brand marketing positions at Hearst and Condé Nast, Babette directs the primary and syndicated research activities across all brands for TMBI. She is instrumental in evolving the company's data strategy and leveraging first party customer data in digital audience targeting for clients. Babette is on the Program Advisory Committee for the Print and Digital Research Forum (PDRF) and is the current MPA Research Committee Chair.

## ABOUT TRUSTED MEDIA BRANDS, INC.

**Trusted Media Brands, Inc.** (formerly known as The Reader's Digest Association, Inc.), is a visionary, brand-driven multiplatform media company whose portfolio of iconic properties and products include Taste of Home, the world's largest circulation food media brand; Reader's Digest; The Family Handyman, America's leading source for DIY; a suite of highly targeted brands including Birds & Blooms, Country, Country Woman, Farm & Ranch Living and Reminisce; and digital properties which include EnrichU, the Taste Community and Haven Home. Trusted Media Brands, Inc. reaches active consumers who genuinely connect with our blend of uplifting and enduring expertly-curated family, food, health, home improvement, finance and humor content – digitally, via social media, magazines and books, and events and experiences. Founded in 1922 by DeWitt Wallace as The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., one of the first user-generated content publishers, Trusted Media Brands, Inc. is headquartered in NYC. For more information visit [TMBI.com](http://TMBI.com).

## ABOUT ADVERTISER PERCEPTIONS

**Advertiser Perceptions** is the global leader providing data-driven business intelligence for the advertising industry. They provide consultative solutions critical to the success of the world's leading media and ad tech companies, agencies and marketers. Their exclusive insights, practical advice and expert guidance produce solutions that deliver results and enable their clients to thrive in today's complex and competitive advertising market. They work with clients to investigate, analyze and interpret the insights they collect, and then develop solutions specific to meeting the individual challenges they face. For more information about their services or to arrange a private briefing, please contact them at 212-626- 6683 or [info@AdvertiserPerceptions.com](mailto:info@AdvertiserPerceptions.com).

