The Digital Marketer's Guide to Contextual Insights and Trends

How to use contextual intelligence to uncover new insights, inform strategies, and launch better digital campaigns
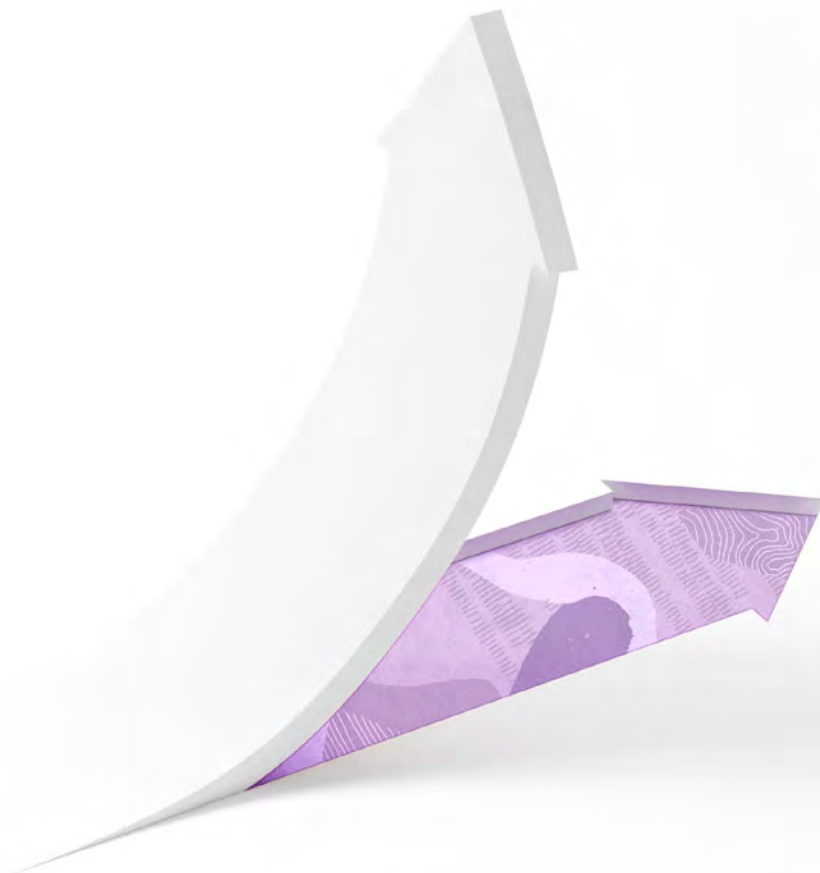
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Why context matters

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With a growing media mix of channels, devices, and platforms to advertise across, the need for strategic planning has never been greater. But with increased data regulation, changing privacy standards, and the phasing out of 3rd party cookies, marketers are pressed to find new sources of data and information that help them create and launch more effective online advertising campaigns.

Enter contextual insights and trends, or Contextual Intelligence, for short.

Amid the various industry shifts occurring in digital advertising, contextual targeting is experiencing its own renaissance. What was once a brand safety solution applied to campaigns at the point of activation is now being used to inform planning and strategy recommendations earlier in the campaign cycle. Why? Because increased agency and brand budgets call for customized technology and actionable insights to drive strategic planning.

Consider this:

81%	**99**%	**90**%
of brand and agency partners listed insights to assist planning as the biggest factor in influencing spend with partners *	of brands would like to see more customized technology to ensure their advertising appears in safe environments *	of brands and agencies intend to increase their budgets for contextual targeting this year *

Source: Theorem Research, May 2019; Sizmek State of Media Report, August 2018; CHEQ and Digiday: Why Advertisers Turn Off Brand Safety Controls Report, June 2019

As you will discover in this guide, Contextual Intelligence reveals deep insights into how people engage with content online, and is therefore becoming an increasingly important tool for today's marketers.

About this guide

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This guide explores the main insights that marketers can discover by including Contextual Intelligence in the research and planning phase of campaign development. Each section explains a context insight or trend in detail using examples from recent Oracle Advertising insight reports.

In addition, each section features commentary on how to apply the insight to your campaign, whether you're a planner, strategist, or campaign manager.

Contextual Intelligence and insights

Contextual Intelligence refers to the insights and trends made available through analyzing content engagement online. While there are myriad insights that can be explored for every campaign and industry vertical, in this guide we will explore the most common contextual insights across various advertising seasons and tentpoles:

1. Content engagement over time

Understand how consumer interest fluctuates online and how to pace your campaigns accordingly.

2. Trending content

Discover the premise of positive and negative content trends and how they can impact a campaign.

3. Related contexts and content categories

Learn about all the ways a page can be interpreted and how broader content categories can add scale and reach by drawing in new and relevant audiences.

Insight 1

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Content engagement over time

Content engagement over time is determined by analyzing the volume of ad calls within any given context segment. When content is published and engaged with online, the page is categorized into a series of segments based on its context, which is determined by analyzing all the words that appear on the page and their relationship with each other. More people engaging with content results in a higher volume of categorizations and ad calls—which can be used for high-level forecasting when planning advertising campaigns, as it reveals how often consumers engage with content.

Figure 1 is a good example of how ad calls increase in the months leading up to a big buying season, such as the holiday season. The graph shows that holiday content begins to trend on November 1 and steadily increases in popularity through to December 20, when it peaks and then drops off as Christmas Day approaches.

Figure 1: Holiday Mentions Over Time
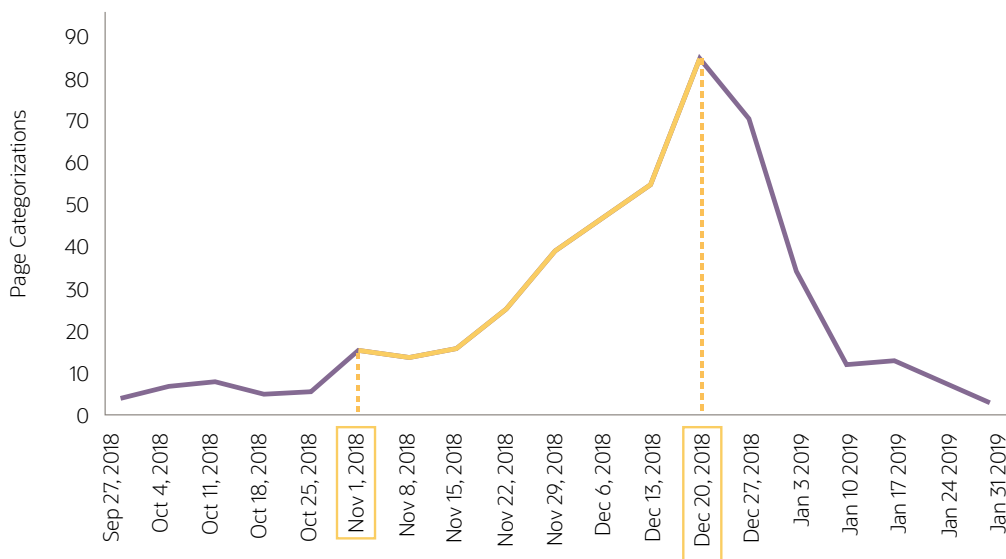
Data based on ad calls from leading DSP provider 09/27/2018 to 01/31/2019

Content engagement over time reflects consumer interest in content. This helps marketers determine peak times of interest and the ideal time frames for online campaigns.

How to use this insight:
Use content engagement over time to assess the best times to launch campaigns, and to understand when consumers are most interested in a particular topic.

In event-based campaigns, engagement over time can help determine the exact moment when consumer interest begins online, and how long it lasts (Figure 1), which helps marketers determine a campaign's ideal pacing and time frame. In addition, content engagement can be segmented by day or week, which provides more specific indicators of when consumers are most interested in content. Figure 2 illustrates this by showing how engagement with credit card content during the 2018 holiday season differs by day of week.

Figure 2: Credit Card Content Engagement: Index by Day
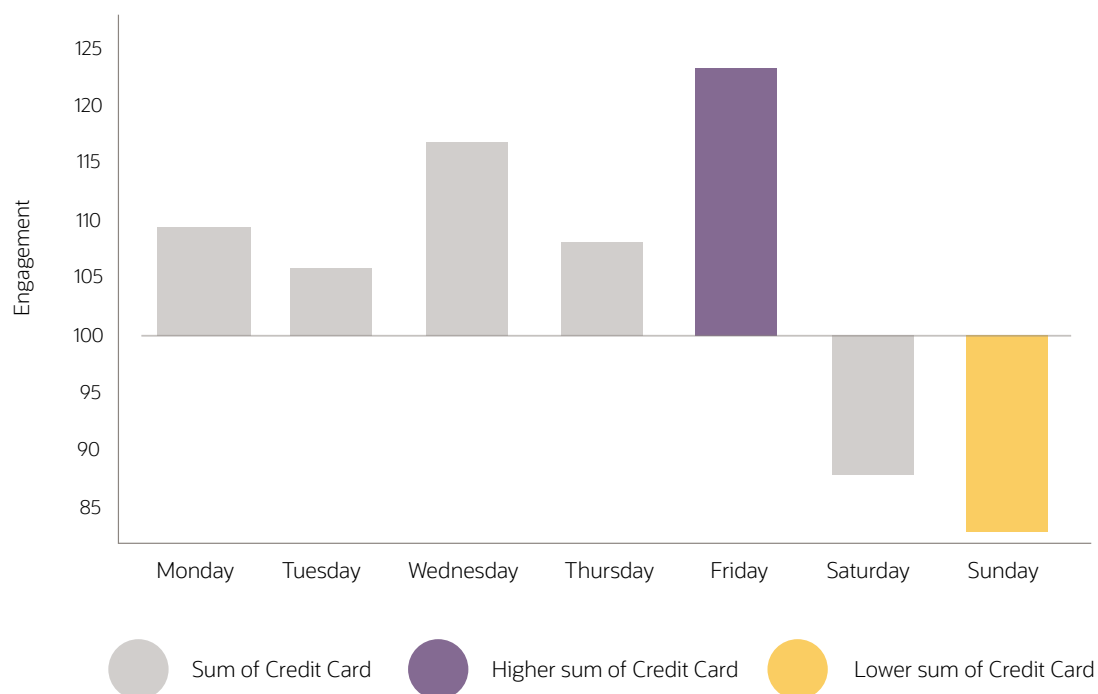
Content engagement over time can be segmented by day or week for more granularity—helping marketers understand when consumers are in the mindset to receive advertising.

The engagement-over-time insight also helps marketers determine the seasonal ebb and flow of consumer interest as it relates to their industries. The 12-month view of content engagement over time is often used in planning phases to identify periods of intense online engagement in addition to the specific seasonal events that drive consumer interest.

How to use this insight:
Understanding peak days for content engagement helps campaign managers alter their bidding strategies to focus on certain days of the week over others.

Figure 3 illustrates this—tracking how content trends evolve over a 12-month period in the travel industry. Seasonal events such as the New Year, spring break, and summer holidays drive increased engagement with travel content online—indicating important times for marketers to focus on their advertising campaigns. Use content engagement to see how events and market factors influence online engagement throughout the year so you can align with consumer mindsets.

Figure 3: Travel Trends Over Time
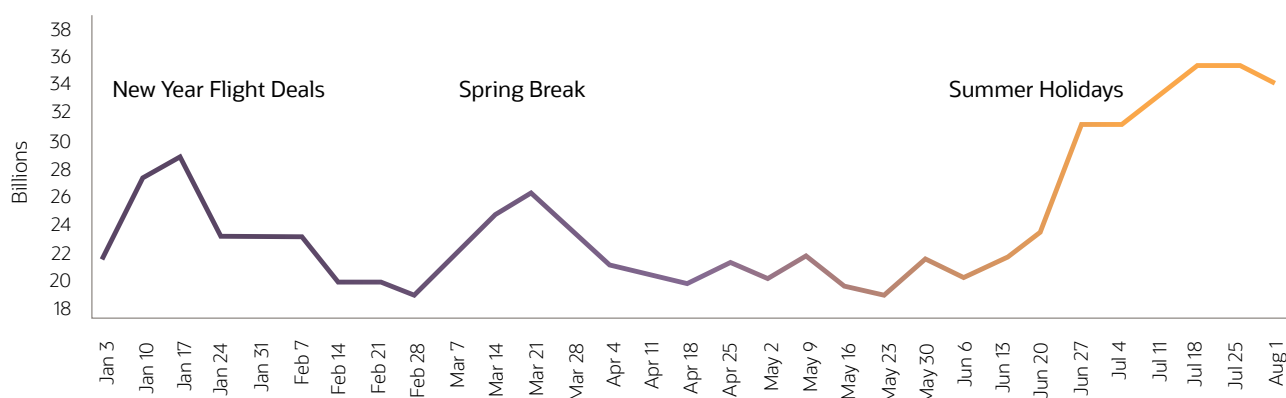
Data based on categorizations from leading DSP provider 01/24/2019 to 07/25/2019

The 12-month view of content engagement over time helps marketers align periods of peak interest with seasonal events and trends. This helps identify key times throughout the year to launch online campaigns.

How to use this insight:

Use content engagement to see how events and market factors influence online engagement throughout the year so you can align with consumer mindsets.

Apply it to your campaign

Strategists

Validate opportunity: The engagement-over-time insight allows you to validate the opportunity at stake for your brand and campaign. When a context segment registers high categorizations, it means there is an increased opportunity to drive brand awareness by focusing on the content inside the segment.

Optimize campaign timing: This insight reveals when consumers are interested in content online and how this interest evolves over time, which is critical to understanding what the ideal time frame is for your campaign.

Understand drivers of intent: On a broader level, content engagement over time offers real insight into how events and industry verticals evolve online. When looking at a 12-month view of any given category, the engagement-over-time insight reveals which events trigger online activity, and which ones drive consumer interest. This helps you better understand the online behavior of your target audience and complements additional audience and industry research.

Campaign Managers

Drive scale and reach: Understanding how and when consumers engage with content online means you can optimize your ads to coincide with periods of high engagement and maximize your budget. Alter your bidding strategy so it's aligned to the days or weeks when engagement is highest to improve scale and reach.

Maximize budget: Understanding when content is trending online means you can target the high-value inventory in these environments before CPMs rise, and be more cost effective with your ad spend.
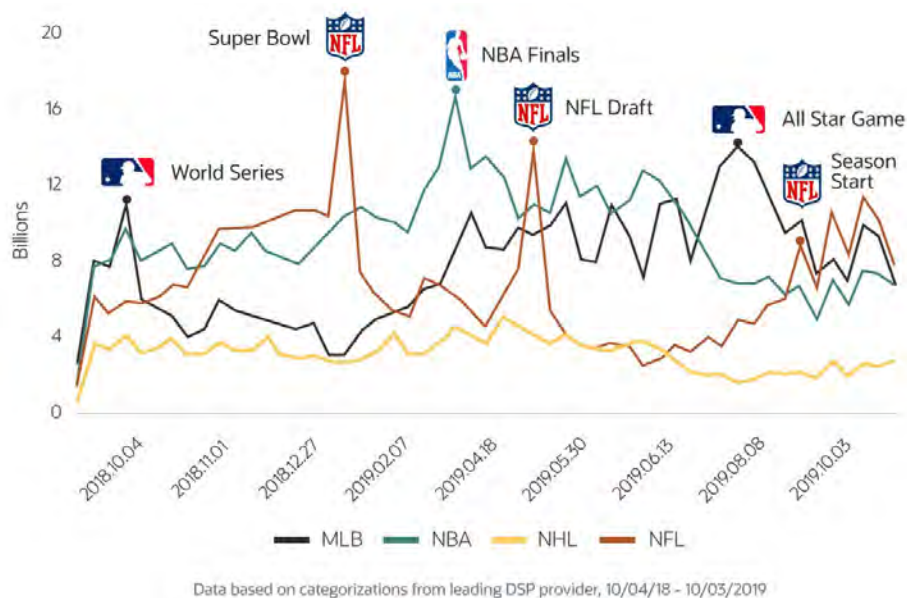
Insight 2

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Trending content

Whether it's a news story that develops in real time, the influence of seasonal events, or cultural trends, online content is constantly evolving. This means there are random content trends that can (and will) emerge out of nowhere to dominate the news and media cycle—and digital marketers need to account for them. These trends can be positive, offering brand-building opportunities; or they can be negative, presenting potential brand safety risks.

Figure 4 illustrates the content trends in the context of the U.S. sporting calendar. In this example, it's evident how major events within each sporting code drive the engagement of content throughout the year. The periods of high engagement reflect moments when consumers are showcasing high intent—they're actively searching for content and are therefore in an ideal mindset to receive advertising related to that topic.

For example, when interest peaks around the time of the Super Bowl, consumers are in an ideal mindset to receive advertising about everything game day related, such as party planning, home entertaining, snacking, and football.

Figure 4: Major League Sports Seasons: Full-Year View

Data based on categorizations from leading DSP provider, 10/04/18 – 10/03/2019

Content trends evolve over time and offer opportunities for marketers to capitalize on moments of high intent.

How to use this insight:

Use content trends to assess the volatility and unpredictability of online content during an event or throughout a 12-month period.

Apply it to your campaign

Strategists

Understand consumer behavior: Content trends help you plan campaigns to align with consumer mindsets and online searches.

Identify popular content topics: Analyzing trends also helps you identify the most popular content topics and interests that are related to a campaign or event, which can help you increase scale by adding different audiences to your campaign.

Campaign Managers

Identify brand safety risks: Trends can be unpredictable, which means they can pose a brand safety threat. But understanding this threat ahead of time means you can plan for it and implement custom brand safety solutions at the point of activation.

Identify brand-building opportunities: On the other hand, if the trending content is positive, you can secure high-value inventory in environments as they begin to trend and CPMs are subsequently at their lowest point. You can do this by activating a dynamic contextual segment for the duration of the campaign. This will ensure the campaign is optimized toward brand-building opportunities while simultaneously avoiding environments that pose threats to brand safety.

Insight 3

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Related contexts and content categories

Contextual Intelligence looks at all the ways a page can be interpreted—allowing marketers to understand the various segments it can be categorized into. This reveals adjacent content topics that attract similar audiences, which can be used for targeting purposes to increase reach and scale in campaigns.

For example, an analysis of the Wimbledon tennis championsships reveals that this event isn't just about tennis. Figure 5 shows all the different ways Wimbledon content is categorized. This indicates that people aren't only reading Wimbledon content for the tennis, but also to understand who turns up to watch, what they wear, and what they eat.

Figure 5: Segment Returns from Wimbledon Content
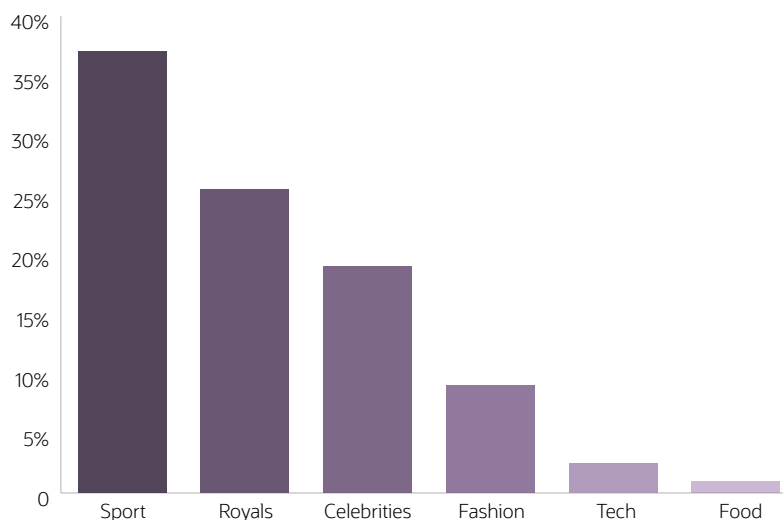
Data based on ad calls from leading DSP provider 06/23/2019 to 07/25/2019

Contextual Intelligence looks at all the ways a page can be interpreted and reveals the adjacent topics that are related to it—offering additional information that can be used for targeting and brand safety purposes.
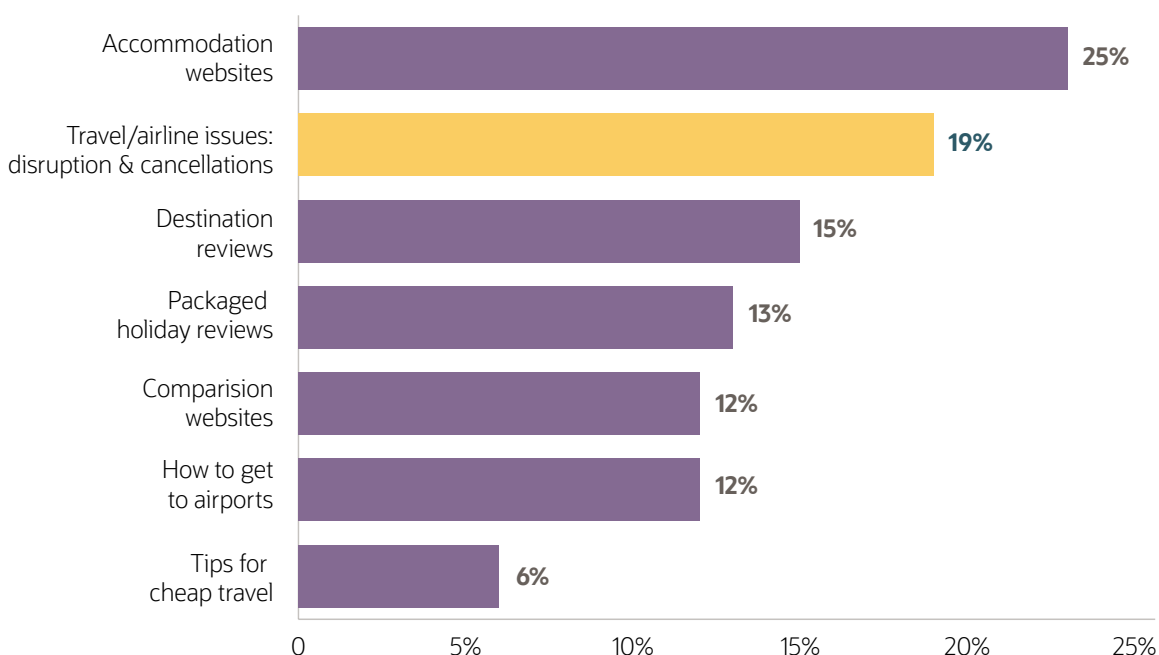
How to use this insight:

Understand the different ways a page can be interpreted to reveal new targeting opportunities with similar audiences and contexts.

Additionally, this insight serves as another way to identify the prevalence of unsafe content within any category. For example, in Figure 6, we see the various ways in which content is categorized in the travel industry. It shows that 19% of all content categorized about travel is related to airline issues such as travel disruption and cancellations—a subject that airlines should avoid when activating their online campaigns. Understanding this ahead of time allows marketers to create custom suitability segments to block this negative content and align their brand messages with relevant, brand-building content instead.

Figure 6: Top Travel Content Type

Content Type	Percentage
Accommodation websites	25%
Travel/airline issues: disruption & cancellations	19%
Destination reviews	15%
Packaged holiday reviews	13%
Comparision websites	12%
How to get to airports	12%
Tips for cheap travel	6%

Understanding the various types of content related to an industry or event allows marketers to identify brand safety risks, in addition to new, relevant audiences for targeting.

How to use this insight:
Use related content types and categories to identify the key reasons consumers engage with content, and align your brand message accordingly.

Apply it to your campaign

Strategists

Identify the reasons why consumers engage with content: The different types of content that relate to your campaign or event reflect the various interests of consumers. Align your brand with the content interests that are most relevant to your campaign to capture your ideal audience.

Understand brand safety risks: Use this insight to balance brand safety risks with opportunities in your campaign, and provide recommendations to ensure your advertising is appearing in brand-suitable environments.

Campaign Managers

Drive incremental reach: By including related content topics in your segment mix, you have the added benefit of incremental reach and scale. The additional segments will pull in high-value inventory that appears in environments related to your brand, vertical, or campaign.

Build better custom segments: Extract specific keywords from the list of related content categories to build better custom segments for targeting and brand safety purposes.

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