FREEWHEEL
A COMCAST COMPANY

1H 2026

Video Monetization Report

SMARTER ADVERTISING: STRONGER RESULTS

VIDEO MONETIZATION REPORT

1H 2026

The FreeWheel Video Monetization Report highlights the changing dynamics of how enterprise-class content owners and distributors are monetizing premium digital video content.

The data set used for this report is one of the largest available on the usage and monetization of professional, rights-managed ad-supported video content worldwide and is based on aggregated advertising data collected through the FreeWheel platform.

In this edition of the VMR, we explore video advertising trends for the first half of 2026 (1H 2026). This report includes findings that build on the insights unveiled in the previous VMR (2H 2025) in both the United States (U.S.) and Europe (EUR).*

**European countries included: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.*

Data Note: VMR categorization of "live" includes FAST channels. Mechanically, ad requests for FAST set "mode = live". Linear addressable is not included in report data.

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Introduction

Streaming has ushered in an era of unprecedented choice for the viewer, with growing subscription-based, ad-supported, and FAST services expanding a market geared towards driving inventory value for publishers and measurable outcomes for advertisers. High user satisfaction contributes to this momentum, as audiences across the U.S. and EUR continue to access the content they want at the right price.[1,2]

With these components in mind, a balance between monetization and the quality of the viewer experience is key to sustaining industry growth. Publishers can find that balance through various forms of innovation, focusing on enabling higher CPMs and stronger advertiser ROI while being mindful of how ad breaks, repetition, and relevancy can be optimized to maintain audience trust. Expanded data and identity partnerships are improving addressability and transparency between parties, while unified buyer-seller infrastructure and enriched bid signals are increasing programmatic efficiency and inventory value. Then there is the AI-powered tech tying things back to the end user: producing automated ways of managing frequency caps, minimizing content disruption, and generating relevant creatives tailored to audience segments.[3]

Together, these advancements are creating a smarter, more efficient multiscreen TV ecosystem that drives growth and addresses the challenges viewers have long faced when it comes to their ad experience. This Video Monetization Report analyzes premium video viewership during the first half of 2026 and explores how these growth trends are impacting the industry.

Key takeaways

01 Connected ecosystems lead to improved outcomes

Cross-platform collaborations and automation capabilities are enabling innovative ways of targeting which lead to optimized experiences for the viewer and more measurable outcomes for buyers.

02 Contextual growth accelerates

Contextual ad views grew by nearly 6 times (5.8x) the rate of overall ad views during the past year for publishers actively utilizing contextual solutions, showcasing this method of targeting as an innovative approach to delivery.

03 Audience engagement remains strong

Completion rate averages were over 90% across pre-, mid- and post-roll ad units for the 3 most popular CTV sub-devices, highlighting strong viewer retention and satisfaction across streaming environments.

04 Demand sources continue to expand

Unique programmatic advertisers grew by +25% year-over-year (YOY) across the U.S. and EUR, offering premium access to a wider range of advertisers.

User adoption contributes to ad view growth

Ad-supported streaming continues to become more prevalent across premium video, with 89% of U.S. viewers and 85% of EUR viewers now subscribing to at least one of these services.[1,2] This rise in consumer adoption is reflected when looking at overall ad views on streaming, as YOY growth reached +12% in the U.S. and +20% in EUR.

Streaming ad view growth

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026

+12%
United States

+20%
Europe

+13%
U.S. + EUR

U.S. and EUR ad view data sets are not equivalent in size.

Live content contains strong monetization potential

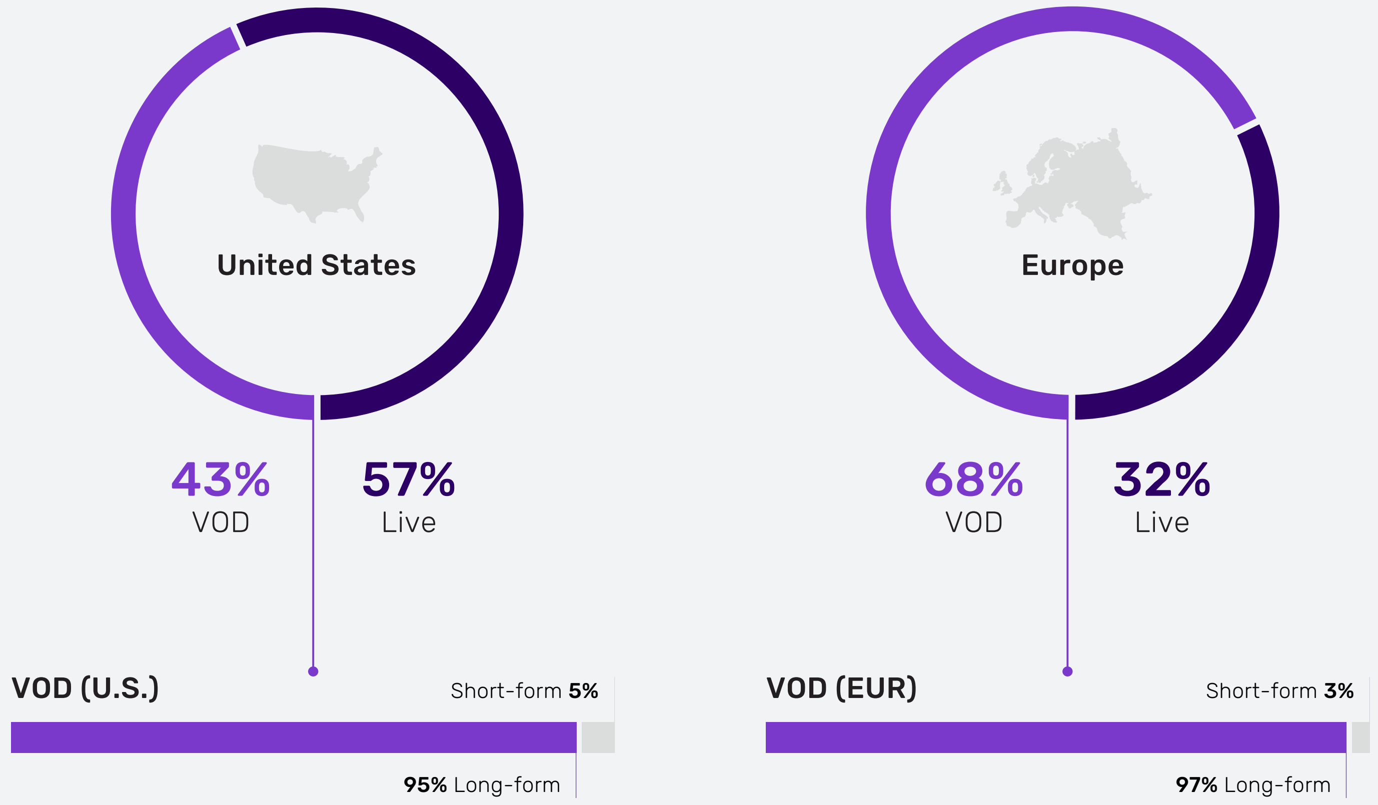
Live content maintained its majority share of overall delivery in the U.S., accounting for 57% of total ad views. This trend was also visible in EUR, as the share of ad views on live content grew by +8% YOY - now representing 32% of total delivery.

Live events gather large audiences together at the same moment in time, creating highly engaged environments which provide more “natural” ad experiences and better viewer retention rates when compared to VOD.[1,2] As a result, publishers expanding investments in sports, news, and live entertainment see these environments as increasingly important drivers of advertising value.

The Importance of Live Signals: Publishers are optimizing user data signals on live inventory with the help of AI-powered tech as a means of producing measurable outcomes for buyers while simultaneously creating a personalized ad experience for the viewer.[4]

Ad view composition by content type

1H 2026



Short-form video is classified as video content under 5 minutes in duration

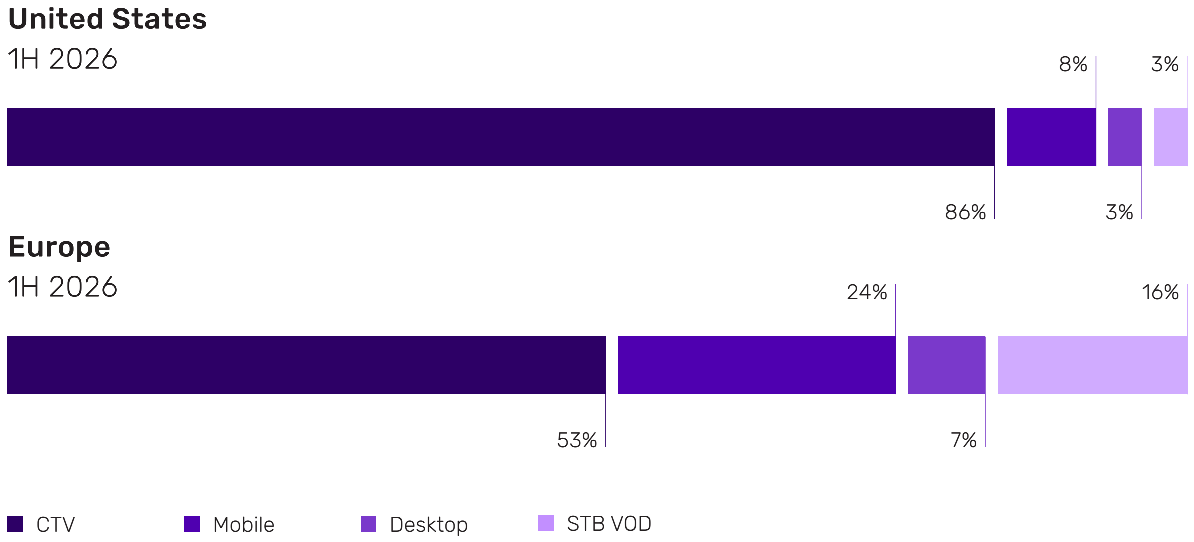
Data Note: VMR categorization of “live” includes FAST channels.
Mechanically, ad requests for FAST set “mode = live”. Linear addressable is not included in report data

CTV devices represent majority of ad delivery across regions

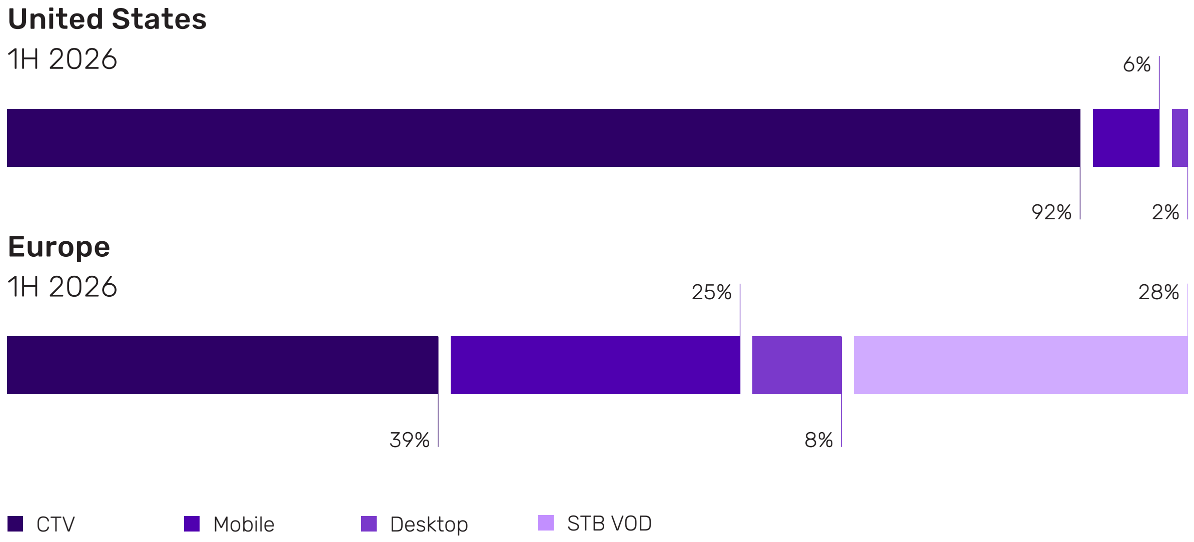
CTV continued to dominate overall premium video consumption, accounting for 86% of total ad views in the U.S. and 53% in EUR. While both regions saw YOY growth in CTV's share of delivery, mobile and STB VOD options remained more prevalent for users in EUR when compared to the U.S.

The share of programmatic delivery via CTV also improved significantly in both regions, rising by +10% in the U.S. and +9% in EUR YOY to represent 92% and 39% of all programmatic impressions, respectively.

Ad view composition by device



Programmatic ad view composition by device



Data Note: U.S. programmatic STB VOD is less than 0.5%

Data partnerships help expand the CTV demand pool

CTV's commanding presence in the market led to YOY ad view growth of +15% in the U.S. and +33% in EUR, as viewers continue to prefer this device type when consuming content.

As CTV ad budgets rise, advances in identity resolution, addressable advertising, and cross-screen measurement provide the opportunity for more personalized targeting on these platforms. Reaching the right audiences at the right moments is key to producing measurable results for stakeholders in the multiscreen TV ecosystem.[5]

Ad view growth on CTV devices

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026

U.S. and EUR ad view data sets are not equivalent in size.

+15%
United States

+33%
Europe

This content was created in whole, or in part, using artificial intelligence.

Programmatic expansion unlocks new demand

Programmatic ad views saw significant YOY growth in the U.S. (+25%) and EUR (+44%), while unique advertisers expanded by +25% across both regions – suggesting a trend of broader access to inventory for a wider range of buyers. By focusing on delivering simplified buying methods and reliable performance metrics to brands – particularly small- and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) – publishers can lower the barriers to entry for new buyers and diversify their demand pool.[6]

Programmatic ad view growth

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026

United States

1H 2025 | 1H 2026 **+25%**

Europe

1H 2025 | 1H 2026 **+44%**

Unique programmatic advertisers

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026 (U.S. + EUR)

Growth in unique advertisers delivering programmatically

1H 2025 | 1H 2026 **+25%**

Growth in ad views from advertisers programmatically

1H 2025 | 1H 2026 **+24%**

U.S. and EUR ad view data sets are not equivalent in size.

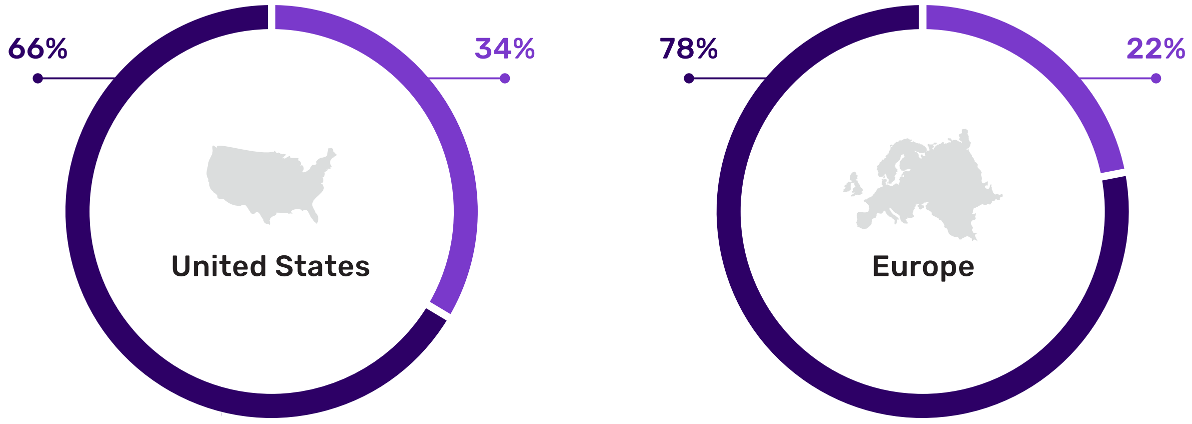
Supply chain automation provides opportunities for programmatic growth

Programmatic delivery accounted for 34% of total ad views in the U.S. and 22% in EUR - shares which steadily increased by +4% and +3% YOY, respectively. Guaranteed deals also saw YOY share growth of +7% in the U.S. and +8% in EUR, offering publishers more security and control on agreements than non-guaranteed options.

Increasing reliance on programmatic sales channels highlights the need for unified infrastructure across the ecosystem as a means of producing efficient workflows. As agentic AI begins to reshape media planning, activation, and optimization, industry leaders increasingly point to established programmatic standards like Model Context Protocol (MCP) as the foundation for future automated collaborations.[7]

Programmatic vs. non-programmatic ad views

1H 2026

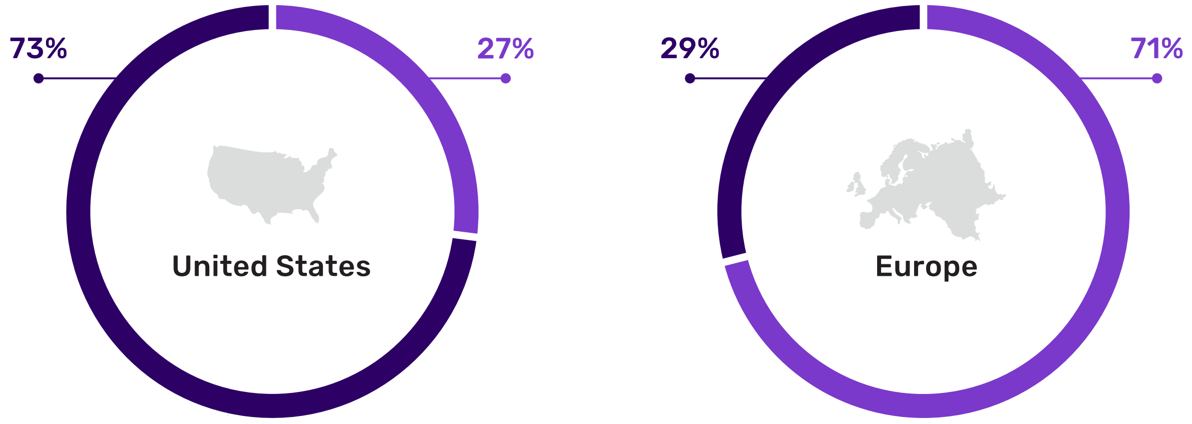


■ Non-programmatic ■ Programmatic

Programmatic: Programmatic, Marketplace Platform Exchange (MPE), Marketplace Platform Private (MPP) – Programmatic
Non-Programmatic: Direct Sold, Reseller Sold, and Marketplace Platform Private (MPP) – Direct

Programmatic ad views by deal type

1H 2026



■ Non-guaranteed ■ Guaranteed

Guaranteed: Deal type includes Programmatic Direct
Non-Guaranteed: All other programmatic deal types

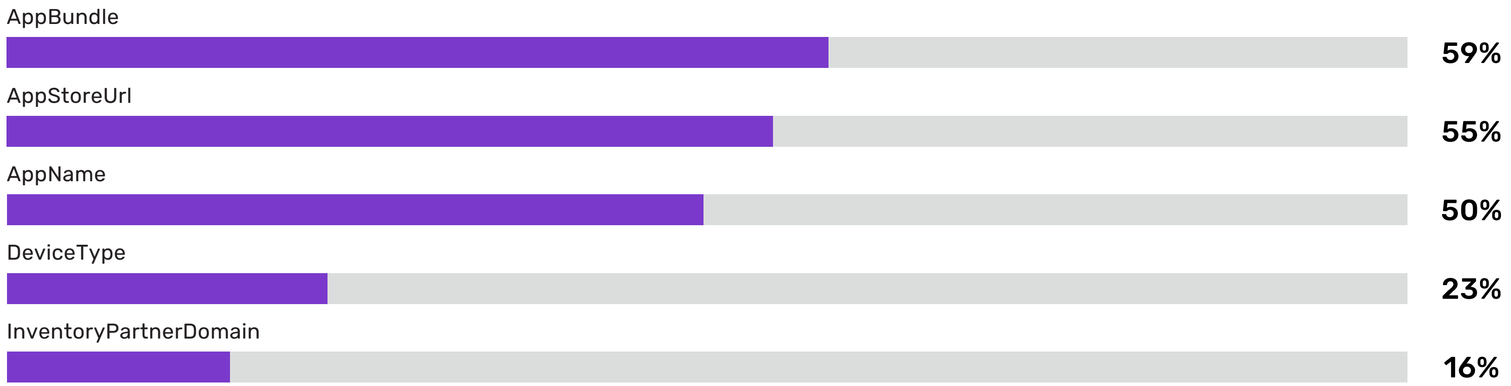
U.S. DATA

Richer metadata boosts inventory value and content visibility

In the U.S., 'AppBundle', 'AppStoreURL', and 'AppName' were the most popular site values passed on endpoints containing customized metadata - present in at least half of all enriched supply. 'Genre' remained the most relied-upon field by a significant margin on the video side, with 66% of enriched supply including this value.

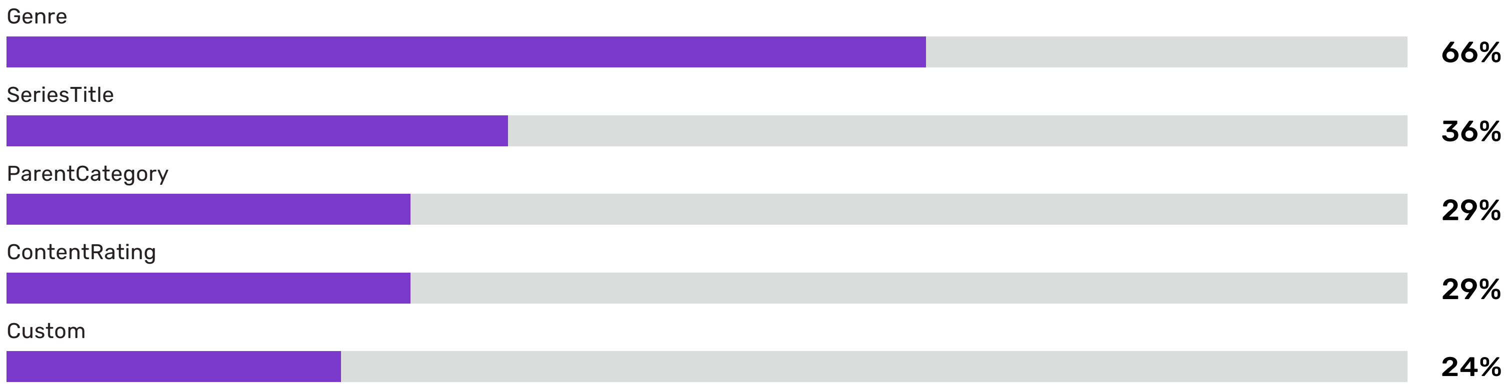
Top 5 site metadata values passed

1H 2026 (U.S.)



Top 5 video metadata values passed

1H 2026 (U.S.)



EUR DATA

The ‘DeviceType’ value had a huge presence on the site side in EUR, being passed in over 90% of enriched supply as the region remains more evenly distributed in its device usage when compared to the U.S. On the video side, the breakdown of passed signals in EUR looked much different than what was seen in the U.S., with values like ‘ContentTitle’ and ‘ContentLanguage’ carrying significantly more relevance in the region.

Universally, metadata signals provide greater visibility to buyers concerning the nature of content – leading to higher confidence in inventory quality, greater CPM lifts for publishers,[8] and better alignment between programming and the ad experience.

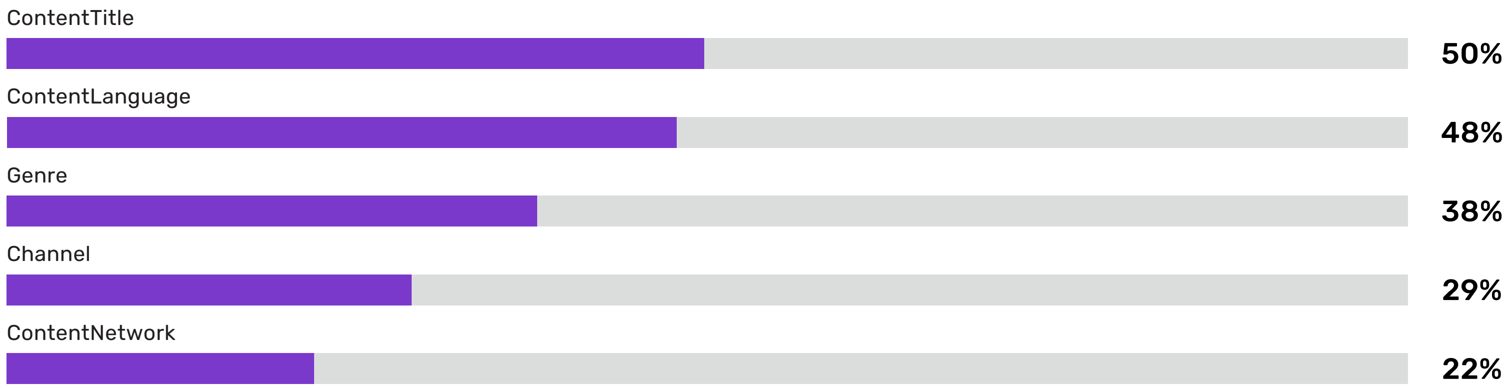
Data note: Percentages for these visuals were calculated by dividing the amount of site or video items containing a specific customized metadata value by the total amount of site or video items containing any customized metadata value(s). For example, out of site items containing any customized metadata value(s), AppBundle was present in 75% of those site items. Customized metadata can be used to pass custom values in bid requests. It is represented as Key Name : Key Value, and the charts reflect the frequency of each Key Name.

Top 5 site metadata values passed

1H 2026 (EUR)

Top 5 video metadata values passed

1H 2026 (EUR)



High completion rates showcase user satisfaction on streaming

Across the three most popular CTV sub-devices, average completion rates for pre-, mid- and post-roll ad units were all above 90%, indicating the strength of streaming as an advertising environment. Access to premium content and lighter ad loads helps keep audiences engaged throughout ad breaks - creating opportunities for publishers to maximize inventory value, drive stronger advertiser outcomes, and maintain user trust.[1,2]

Ad completion rates by position

1H 2026 (U.S. + EUR)

Pre-roll	Mid-roll	Post-roll
94%	98%	91%

Data note: To ensure accuracy, the information included in this visual was calculated from a sub-group of the overall data set used for this report: consisting of the total delivery across the three most popular CTV sub-devices (Roku, Samsung TV, and Amazon Fire TV).

Universal IDs lead to enriched supply and more accurate targeting

Ad views associated with targeted audiences increased by +5% in the U.S. and +11% in EUR YOY, while audience shares slightly favored demographic targeting in both regions.

The ability to enrich bid requests with universally-recognized identifiers is a prime example of industry evolution that can drive the expansion of available addressable inventory. By adding ID signals to once limited supply, publishers can improve targeting capabilities and offer buyers access to reliable audience data.[9]

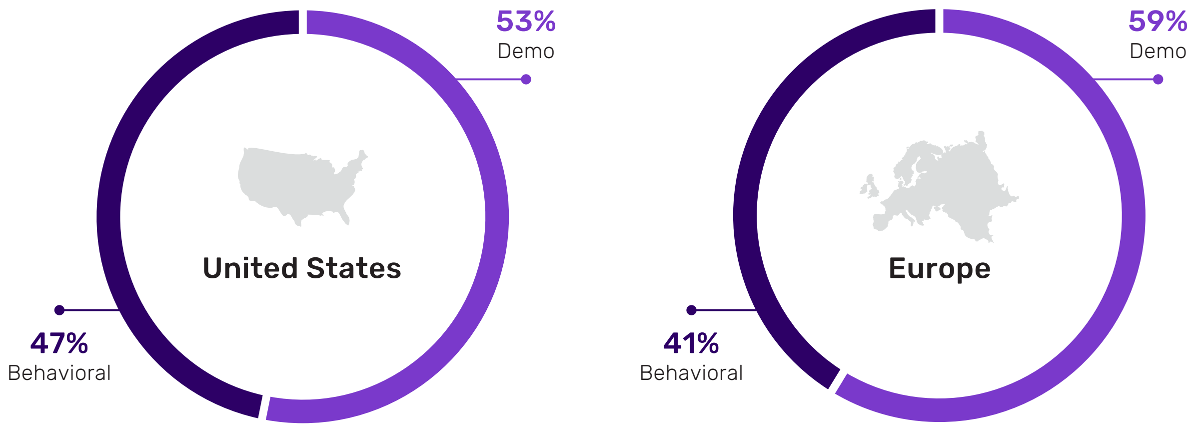
Retail Media Networks and Viewer Preferences: Data signal collaborations between Retail Media Networks (RMNs) and ad serving technology provide the opportunity for real-time matching of viewer preferences to relevant demand via specific programming types, optimizing deal performance while also more accurately engaging the target audience.[10,11]

Audience targeting growth

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026

Targeted audience share

1H 2026



Contextual solutions unlock new targeting opportunities

Despite still being a small piece of the delivery pie, YOY contextual ad view growth outpaced overall ad view growth by nearly six times among publishers utilizing this method of targeting.

While identity enrichment expands addressable inventory, recent breakthroughs in contextual targeting give publishers the power to reliably deliver highly relevant ads to viewers based purely on the nature of the programming itself. AI-powered tools capture visual and text-based signals from vast libraries of video content and convert that input into usable segments for buyers, improving brand awareness and user sentiment without the need for audience identifiers.[12,13]

Data note: The information included in this visual was calculated from a sub-group of the overall data set used for this report: consisting of the total ad views delivered via publishers actively utilizing contextual targeting.

Rate of ad view growth via contextual targeting relative to overall ad view growth

5.8x

1H 2025 vs. 1H 2026

(U.S. + EUR)

AI and Contextual Targeting: 60% of buyers believe AI improves contextual targeting capabilities by enabling closer alignment of ads with content.[3]

Conclusion

The first half of 2026 demonstrated that streaming's continued growth attributes to multiple sources: not only the rapid advancements seen in automated tech powering supply chain efficiencies and monetization, but also the rise of ad-supported services, CTV adoption, and high rates of viewer satisfaction.

As the industry becomes increasingly connected, intelligent, and outcome-driven, streaming's future success will likely depend on how effectively innovative elements can complement each other to satisfy each stakeholder in the ecosystem. While publishers are focused on supporting initiatives that drive inventory value, buyers are interested in tools that will help them access in-depth content signals, audience data, and measurement capabilities to boost ROIs.

Ultimately, these elements must come together to enable an ad experience that's relevant, timely, and engaging for viewers. Looking ahead, publishers that can make their inventory more discoverable, measurable, and actionable for buyers will be best positioned to capture emerging demand – allowing for greater precision and relevance when it comes to reaching audiences effectively.

This content was created in whole, or in part, using artificial intelligence.

About the authors

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Glossary

Ad view – Occurs each time an ad is displayed

Agentic AI – The ability of a system to autonomously plan and take independent actions toward goals, operating proactively and requiring less human oversight

Behavioral targeting – Targeting audiences based on their activities (e.g., shopping habits)

Contextual targeting – Targeting audiences based on the content itself

CTV (Connected Television) – A television set that is connected to the internet via OTT devices, Blu-ray players, streaming box or stick, and gaming consoles, or has built-in internet capabilities (e.g., a Smart TV) and can access a variety of long-form and short-form web-based content

Deal – A programmatic transaction between advertisers and publishers

Demo targeting – Targeting audiences based on demographic information such as age and gender

DTC (Direct-to-Consumer) – Subscription-based service offered directly from content owner to watch owned content without a distributor subscription (e.g., Peacock, Max)

EUR – Includes the following countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom

FAST (Free Ad-Supported Streaming Television) – Ad-supported live streaming without a subscription (e.g., Tubi, PlutoTV, Xumo)

Generative AI (GenAI) – AI trained on patterns to create new content such as text, code, images, or videos

Guaranteed deals – A transaction priority that ensures available supply by guaranteeing purchase of a set number of impressions

Live – Content that viewers are watching in the same real-world time with simultaneous commercial breaks

Long-form – Video content 5 minutes or longer

Mobile – Content viewed on mobile devices and apps

MCP (Model Context Protocol) – a standardized framework which facilitates communication between different AI systems, enabling cross-platform interactions without the need for individual custom integrations

MPP (Marketplace Platform Private) – A transaction type in FreeWheel's Marketplace that allows for private transactions between a specific buyer and seller

Multiscreen TV – Multiple TV/streaming endpoints

Non-programmatic – Direct sold inventory that is not programmatic (i.e., Direct Sold, Reseller Sold, MPP)

OTT (Over-the-Top) – Refers to content providers that distribute streaming media as a standalone product directly to viewers over the Internet, bypassing telecommunications, multichannel television, and broadcast television platforms that traditionally act as a controller or distributor of such content

Predictive AI – The ability of a system to use historical data and statistical models to forecast future outcomes or behaviors

Programmatic – The use of automation software or managed services to execute an advertising deal

Publisher – Includes traditional media owners as well as OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) that provide digital ad inventory on owned or operated platforms such as smart TVs, mobile devices, or other connected hardware

Retail Media Networks (RMNs) – Advertising platform operated by a retailer which utilizes first-party customer data for targeting and measurement purposes

Short-form (Clips) – Video content less than 5 minutes

STB VOD (Set-Top Box VOD) – Accompanies a cable/broadcast/satellite setup; contains a cable input and outputs to a TV

Streaming – Video content delivered via an internet connection

Traditional TV - Content delivered via wired cable or telco, satellite or over-the-air distribution (verses the internet)

VOD (Video on Demand) – Programming that lets a viewer select and watch a video (e.g., movie, TV episode) whenever they choose, rather than at a scheduled broadcast time

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More Information

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FreeWheel technology is built for streaming and TV ads. We connect buyers and sellers directly, making it easier to access supply and demand. We provide all the tools, data, and insights you need to maximize results. Read more insights on TV and premium video advertising here.

AI in TV Advertising

The Buyer, Seller, and Viewer Perspective

AI is advancing quickly across the TV advertising ecosystem. This report examines buyer, seller, and viewer perspectives on AI's role in advertising, where those perspectives converge or differ, and what those dynamics could mean for broader adoption across the industry.

Download Report

Voice of the Viewer | U.S. & EUR

How ad experiences impact streaming for viewers

The U.S.- and EUR-focused reports dive into viewer sentiment on streaming, revealing where viewers are satisfied, where they're frustrated, and how advertising impacts their overall experience — offering advertisers and publishers advice on how to ensure the ad experience keeps up with viewer expectations.

Download U.S. Report | Download EUR Report

Connecting the Streaming Ecosystem

Video Marketplace Report 2H 2025

This edition of the Video Marketplace Report examines the trends transforming the ecosystem, from programmatic growth and audience targeting to AI-powered automation and enhanced inventory transparency. Together, these developments are creating a more efficient and connected marketplace for buyers and sellers.

Download Report

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