

/LiveRamp

eBook

# The 2026 Upfronts Activation Playbook

Your guide to reaching your ideal audiences on digital's biggest screens



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# Introduction: Tuning in to TV's digital reality

For brand marketers heading into the Upfronts, connected TV (CTV) is no longer experimental – it's a media must-have. As more viewers access streaming services and on-demand content, CTV is becoming the primary way to watch at-home entertainment.

CTV adoption is almost universal. Recent research shows that 88% of US households have [at least one CTV device](#), and viewers aren't just watching, they're taking action. [Nearly half](#) of CTV users said they've made a purchase after seeing a TV ad. Viewers also [spend more time](#) watching CTV than traditional TV, yet linear still matters. Roughly a [third of Americans](#) continue to watch cable or satellite, especially for live events.

## How does this impact your Upfronts planning?

- Marketers must juggle cross-platform deals, including linear, CTV, streaming, and digital video inventory, while avoiding waste and overlap.
- Guaranteed, outcome-based performance that delivers more than proxy metrics is non-negotiable when committing budgets.
- Ad experiences should live up to the content as platforms like Netflix set high standards for entertainment quality in the viewer experience.



# NETFLIX



**We're bringing a different creative experience to the advertising world. What we shouldn't do in CTV is lift and shift the linear model between ad load and the creative experience.**

**Nicolle Pangis** / VP of Advertising / Netflix

“We're bringing a different creative experience to the advertising world,” said Nicolle Pangis, VP of Advertising, Netflix at RampUp 2026. “What we shouldn't do in CTV is lift and shift the linear model between ad load and the creative experience.”

At the same time, the complex TV landscape makes precise targeting and measurement even more challenging. How can you reach the right audiences across such diverse and rapidly evolving streaming inventory? And how can you unify your measurement across linear and CTV while optimizing reach across screens, platforms, and devices?

The answer starts with your data. Activating first-party audiences is the key to finding high-value viewers across CTV publishers, powering smarter Upfront allocations, and closing the loop on performance – so every impression, and every Upfront dollar, is tied back to measurable outcomes.

In this playbook, we'll show you how to build a stronger CTV strategy with your first-party data, helping you win the moments that matter most – before, during, and after Upfronts season is over.

SECTION 1

# Why TV precision relies on data activation





Bringing all of those sources together and making sure that they're de-duplicated on an identity level, on a person level, and a household level is really important to be able to carry through measurement and pin a business outcome to the media that was run.

**Melanie Brown** / Vice President of Advanced TV / Tubi

A single campaign with a CTV partner can quickly become a sprawling measurement challenge. Many programmers run content across upwards of 25 or more distribution points, including national linear, over-the-top (OTT) streaming apps, smart TVs, programmatic ad platforms, social networks (and other walled gardens), and set-top box addressable inventory through multichannel video programming distributors (MVPDs).

The complexity of this video landscape increases the need for holistic audience targeting, across the blended linear/digital landscape of “convergent TV.” As Melanie Brown, Vice President of Advanced TV at Tubi, the popular free TV and movie streaming platform, explains: “Bringing all of those sources together and making sure that they're de-duplicated on an identity level, on a person level, and a household level is really important to be able to carry through measurement and pin a business outcome to the media that was run.”

Data activation is the ability to use your data wherever you want — across any CTV channel, browser, mobile device, or social platforms — to reach and measure engagement with your customers. That involves combining customer data from siloed sources and platforms (such as cloud data warehouses or a CRM system), so you can create unified profiles and a single source of truth. Once data is centralized and streamlined, teams can define specific audience segments and push those criteria to operational tools, from ad servers and DSPs to business intelligence or analytics platforms.

# Data activation supports several key aspects of effective CTV advertising



**Audience-first planning:** Rather than relying on the brute force of traditional demographics or content-based targeting, you can build CTV campaigns around specific audience segments defined by common behaviors, interests, or expressed purchase intent.



**Data-driven decisioning:** Instead of flying blind when it comes to TV buys, you can view audience trends and ad performance in real time, and make informed choices about ad placements, creative messaging, and future budget allocation.



**Content consideration:** Align your CTV investments with how your customers watch TV throughout the day – from shorter-form content on YouTube or Hulu in the morning to longer TV binges on Max or Prime Video in the evening.



**Digital acceleration:** Reallocate a portion of your ad dollars from linear TV to CTV to drive higher engagement and ROI, as digital targeting remains relatively cheap for its share of attention- only behind mobile screens in [minutes per day](#).

By activating customer data alongside your CTV partners and shifting your media planning to an audience-based approach, advertisers can transcend the limitations of traditional TV buying and unlock the full potential of CTV's targeting capabilities.

Over 80% of advertisers are increasing their investments in convergent TV – but unified measurement remains a challenge to driving improved performance.

SECTION 2

# How activation works in CTV and beyond





Roughly 90% of our digital impressions now come from CTV devices. By developing a private identity graph with LiveRamp, we're able to unlock one of the largest connected TV addressable inventory sets on the market, and their connectivity in the space makes it easier to send that data to third-party measurement partners and get insights more quickly.

**David Krenn** / VP of Data Advancement and Vendor Enablement / Paramount

As new CTV channels and offerings proliferate, brands need a more holistic approach to data activation. That requires the assembly of first-party customer data, enriched with third-party audience segments, and executed thoughtfully across ad-tech partners.

For most CTV players, data activation has become table stakes to advertiser success and sustained revenue growth. "Roughly 90% of our digital impressions now come from CTV devices," says David Krenn, VP of Data Advancement and Vendor Enablement at Paramount. "By developing a private identity graph with LiveRamp, we're able to unlock one of the largest connected TV addressable inventory sets on the market, and their connectivity in the space makes it easier to send that data to third-party measurement partners and get insights more quickly."

Let's break down the key components and steps of this process.

# Key components of data activation



**Your [first-party data](#):** This information comes directly from customer interactions through your owned channels, including browsing behavior, purchase history, and personal information, as well as CRM data from sales inquiries and customer service interactions. The reliability of first-party data enables personalized advertising across channels, while complying with opt-in consumer privacy laws.



**Second- and third-party data:** External platforms and offline partners can provide critically additive insights into relevant age groups or lifestyle cohorts within each audience. While most marketers use first-party data, [only roughly half](#) use [second-party](#) (other companies' first-party) or [third-party](#) data. Combining internal and external data sets helps with audience discovery, suppressed ad exposures, and cross-channel personalization.



**Contextual data signals:** Beyond audience data, contextual cues from CTV and agency partners can help describe the environment in which your ads appear, such as content genre, viewing time, or device type. These cookieless signals don't rely on any personal information, and can drive significantly higher engagement and conversion rates when a brand or product is matched with the right programming moments.



**Unified identity:** A [privacy-centric identifier](#) (like RampID) acts as a global translator, connecting various data sets and disparate identifying information into a unified customer profile. Trusted IDs bridge the gaps between channels, publishers, and brands across the vast digital ecosystem, wherever your consumers are watching TV.

# Steps to building a data activation strategy



**Data onboarding:** [Integrate your organization's first-party data](#) to create comprehensive customer profiles, including online and offline data from your CRM, websites, apps, social media, ad partners, and other touchpoints. This [data onboarding process](#) results in clean, accurate data that provides the bedrock for customer insights and campaign optimization.



**Data analysis:** Organize and map your data to get a holistic view of customer interactions and eliminate blind spots across the customer journey. Use predictive and attribution models to identify potential areas for greater personalization or strategic reallocation of CTV spend.



**Data activation:** Distill your audience into targeted segments and distribute these criteria to your chosen CTV advertising partners and ad-tech platforms. From there, you'll be able to create campaign strategies that tailor content and messaging to individual households or consumers, and reduce the risk of excess ad frequency, audience overlap, and other kinds of media waste.



**Measure outcomes:** Once your data is activated across channels, use [cross-screen measurement](#) to continually assess data quality and understand which platforms and channels are performing best for your target audiences. With trusted insights around campaign ROI, you can pinpoint opportunities to refine segmentation, targeting, and personalization strategies to meet and surpass your advertising goals.

The benefits of data activation in CTV compound over time. More relevant ads drive higher audience engagement, which leads to better campaign outcomes and higher return on ad spend (ROAS). This lift in performance increases the monetization and value of publishers' TV inventory, generating profits that fund more great programming which further boost viewer engagement and loyalty. And the cycle continues.

SECTION 3

# Proven strategies to maximize CTV spend

In the new era of CTV, maximizing ad spend requires the full power of data activation. Let's explore some proven strategies from industry leaders like NBCUniversal, Roku, Kroger, and Nielsen.



## Expand your total audience reach

# NBCUniversal

Turn [customer intelligence](#) into your strategic advantage. Activate first- and third-party data across trusted CTV devices, OTT streaming partners, and top media networks to easily create and target high-value audience segments. You can also make your existing TV budgets go farther, by suppressing existing customers or redundant prospects in your incremental ad buys — reducing waste and maximizing your campaign efficiency.

A [consistent identity framework](#) helps brands recognize audiences across platforms and devices, even at the household or individual level. And [data clean rooms](#) speed up cross-platform analysis (using pseudonymized PII), so brands can respond quickly to changing market conditions. For example, [Universal Pictures](#) uses this collaborative approach to combine thousands of attributes — across first-party data from its NBC Unified platform, and affiliate data from its Fandango online ticketing service — into hyper-detailed customer profiles.

As SVP of Data Product and Partnerships at [NBCU Enterprise](#), Kaitie Coghlan, [explains](#): “One of the cool things that we can do is take a large first-party advertiser set, bring it in and match it up to our first-party NBC Unified audiences, and tell one of the largest brands in the world, ‘Hey, you thought your viewers were on CNBC. Well, they’re actually on E!, or a large part of your viewers are over-indexing on these channels.’”

Working together, brands and publishers can identify custom audiences everywhere they watch TV, and discover the most impactful moments to advertise and engage.

**Enhance your first-party data set with rich audience insights from third-party data partners, such as [LiveRamp’s Data Marketplace](#).**

## Deliver deeply personalized experiences



With the power of digital, brands should strive for nothing less than a tailored, relevant message for every CTV viewer. A [durable, cross-platform identifier](#) helps buyers ensure that ads reach the right viewers (and avoid the wrong ones) regardless of where they're watching. They also enforce a more holistic ad delivery strategy, supporting trusted frequency caps for every household or individual. This prevents viewer fatigue and ensures you're not wasting impressions on viewers who have already seen your ad multiple times.

Brands can further optimize their buys through [data collaboration](#) with their closest business partners. For example, CPG brands increasingly partner with retailers to retarget shoppers of specific product categories, significantly boosting campaign conversion rates. In recent years, for example, streaming platform [Roku](#) and grocery retailer [Kroger](#) teamed up to combine store purchase data with OTT viewing data, unlocking hyper-precise, in-market audience targeting and [closing the loop on measuring ad effectiveness](#).

As a veteran of the audience data space, Derek Leonard, Head of Data Collaboration at Roku, [sees](#) endless possibilities in the latest privacy-centric innovations. "With clean room technology, you can think about Kroger and

Roku working together with not just one but multiple brands. You can bring in the brand data itself and show offline conversions, or bring in other CTV providers or retail partners. All of these things are part of a larger ecosystem that becomes that much more powerful."

**Learn how Paramount and Circana personalize TV inventory for stronger reach, lift, and monetization by speeding up data activation.**



# Innovate while being privacy conscious



As consumer data regulations tighten, it's crucial for brands and publishers to respect privacy while still delivering effective targeting. Privacy-centric identifiers allow you to maintain targeting accuracy even within the cookieless environment of CTV. You can also use [cloud connectors](#) and [data clean rooms](#) to minimize data movement, keeping personal information secure while still enabling effective data activation and audience targeting.

[Data collaboration](#) gives you a competitive edge in today's advertising market, helping you fill in gaps in your audience insights. For example, [NBCUniversal](#) became one of the first major CTV providers to use Google's Display & Video 360 Publisher Advertiser Identity Reconciliation (PAIR), which enables the secure matching of the network's first-party data with marketers' data. This privacy-centric approach allows NBCU to offer advertisers enhanced targeting capabilities while respecting viewer privacy, setting a new standard for the industry.

These privacy advances are changing how even TV's biggest incumbent players conduct business. [Nielsen](#), the traditional standard-bearer for TV audience ratings, recently made LiveRamp's [RampID](#) interoperable with

advanced audience planning and measurement in Nielsen ONE. Now, brands and agencies can seamlessly connect first- and third-party data sources to CTV inventory, and easily activate and measure custom-built advanced audiences without the need for third-party cookies.

**With LiveRamp and Snowflake, media leaders at Omnicom, LG Ads, and Warner Bros. Discovery drive privacy-centric, identity-powered TV advertising.**



SECTION 4

# What you need in a CTV activation partner

For the strategic marketer looking to maximize ad budgets, there are few opportunities more lucrative than CTV. But navigating this complex and fast-changing landscape requires more than just data – it demands a sophisticated technology stack and deep connectivity across media partners. Fortunately, you don't have to go it alone.



# To successfully activate your data in CTV, you need a partner that can deliver both expertise and scale, through solutions like:



A [durable, privacy-centric identifier](#) that can connect your customer data across all CTV and digital touchpoints, with built-in safeguards to protect privacy while delivering and maintaining deeply personalized experiences.



A [premier ecosystem of data partners](#) and publishers that provide instant access to high-quality third-party data and customer insights.



A [scalable way to reach authenticated audiences](#) that offers full interoperability and scale for advertising everywhere your customers are by seamlessly distributing data to advertising platforms in a premier ecosystem.



Flexible [data collaboration](#) capabilities to work productively with partners across channels and ecosystems and support data-driven planning, cross-screen measurement, ROAS analysis, and more.

OmnicomGroup



LiveRamp is an essential partner in the identity ecosystem for television. You really can't function without it.

**Kelly Metz** / Chief Investment Officer / Omnicom Media Group

The most impactful technology partner will simplify all of these foundational data needs, and more. Many of the world's most innovative companies choose [LiveRamp](#) as their data collaboration platform, using RampID, clean rooms, marketplaces, and more to forge deeper audience connections and greater brand value. As Kelly Metz from Omnicom Media Group puts it: "LiveRamp is an essential partner in the identity ecosystem for television. You really can't function without it."

# Activate your first-party data to these popular CTV destinations for better campaign reach and outcomes:

			
			

Learn how you can activate data across more than 350 destinations, including top CTV and online video platforms, with our interactive product tour.

If you're ready to get started with CTV data activation:

[→ TALK WITH OUR EXPERTS](#)

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LiveRamp is the data collaboration platform of choice for the world's most innovative companies. Visit us at [LiveRamp.com](https://www.liveramp.com)