



Consumer Expectations for Privacy and Relevance in a Data-Driven World

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Executive summary

In today's data-driven world, consumer expectations for privacy and relevance continue to evolve. While Canadians remain concerned about how their personal information is used online, they also recognize and expect the benefits of tailored digital experiences, including relevant advertising, customized recommendations, and exclusive offers.

This research examines these shifting consumer attitudes towards privacy protection and their desire for relevant content and offerings.

Key findings include:

- ✓ **High online shopping engagement but concerns about data sharing:** Eighty-seven per cent of Canadians shop online. The vast majority (90%) are at least somewhat concerned about the privacy of their personal information online.
- ✓ **Desire for relevant ads and high expectations for a personalized experience:** Most Canadian consumers (73%) prefer receiving digital ads relevant to their interests over generic, unrelated ads, an increase of 12% since 2023.
- ✓ **Transparency and regulation improve trust:** Fifty-nine per cent of Canadians feel more comfortable sharing their data when they understand how it will be used, have control over their preferences, and can opt-out when desired. Three-quarters (75%) believe that stronger privacy laws would enhance their comfort in sharing data with businesses for marketing purposes, slightly up from 73% in 2023.
- ✓ **Frustration and consent fatigue:** A growing number of Canadians (41%) find cookie consent pop-ups irritating, with 26% viewing them as an inconvenience that disrupts their browsing experience.
- ✓ **Value exchange expectations:** Most Canadians (73%) are comfortable sharing their information in exchange for benefits like special offers, discounts and enhanced shopping experiences.
- ✓ **When trust takes a hit, so does the bottom line:** Canadians' trust in an organization drops significantly if the organization does not adequately protect their data. About three-quarters (77%) of Canadians are at least somewhat likely to switch brands if their brand does not take adequate measures to protect their data.

This report underscores the importance of two key policy objectives: protecting consumer privacy and enabling digital innovation to meet customer needs and expectations. As policymakers shape the future of data regulation, they must consider consumer expectations for both security and the benefits of personalized experiences. Businesses, in turn, must build trust by providing transparency, clear opt-in choices, and responsible data practices.

By understanding these dynamics, regulators, businesses, and consumers can collaboratively create a digital landscape that respects privacy while enabling meaningful, personalized engagement in the Canadian marketplace.

Introduction

In recent years, the global landscape of data protection and privacy regulation has undergone a significant transformation. This shift reflects a growing focus on safeguarding personal information in our increasingly digital world.

Yet, as governments tighten regulation, consumers are becoming more accustomed to receiving information, ads and offers about products and services that they need or want, rather than random ads that are irrelevant to them.

As policymakers consider new laws and regulations, it is vital for them to consider shifting consumer expectations and preferences.

This research study, conducted by Sago research – a long-standing global leader in research, reveals that, while Canadians are concerned about the security of their personal information, they also want and expect to receive relevant and timely information, ads and offers online.

The implementation of stringent privacy regulations can have significant implications for businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Modernized consumer privacy protections help ensure Canada maintains a competitive economic position in the global digital economy. High compliance costs could make Canadian companies less competitive globally, adding another layer of complexity to the regulatory landscape.

This consumer research explores the multifaceted nature of consumer privacy in the data era, examining the current regulatory environment, consumer attitudes and potential economic impacts. Consumers and marketers alike recognize the need for strong privacy laws to achieve two key purposes: protecting consumer privacy and enabling organizations to reach consumers with the products and services that they want and expect.

By considering all aspects of this complex issue, we aim to provide policymakers and regulators with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Our goal is to contribute to the development of a regulatory framework that protects consumer privacy while fostering innovation and maintaining economic competitiveness.



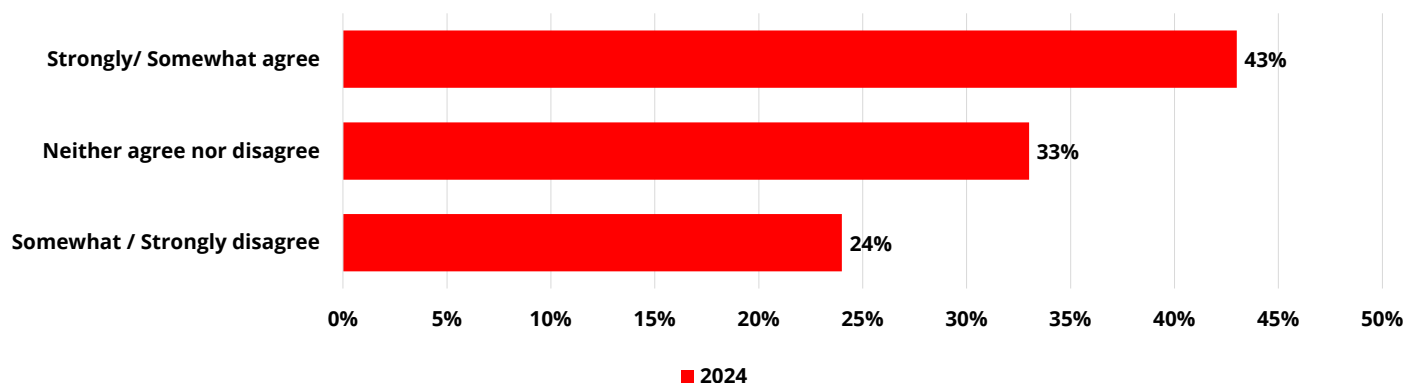
While Canadians are concerned about the security of their personal information, they also want and expect to receive relevant and timely information, ads and offers online.

In today's data-driven world, consumer expectations have fundamentally changed

When browsing for products or services online, Canadian consumers expect faster more relevant information to help them save time and money. Most Canadians shop online (87%), and most are accustomed to receiving push notifications and search engines that respond to customized algorithms. Consumers know they benefit from advanced pricing, product discounts and other loyalty rewards.

Consumers understand the reality of data collection, and the benefit it brings to them. Almost twice as many Canadians agree that organizations should be able to use data as long as they safeguard people's personal information.

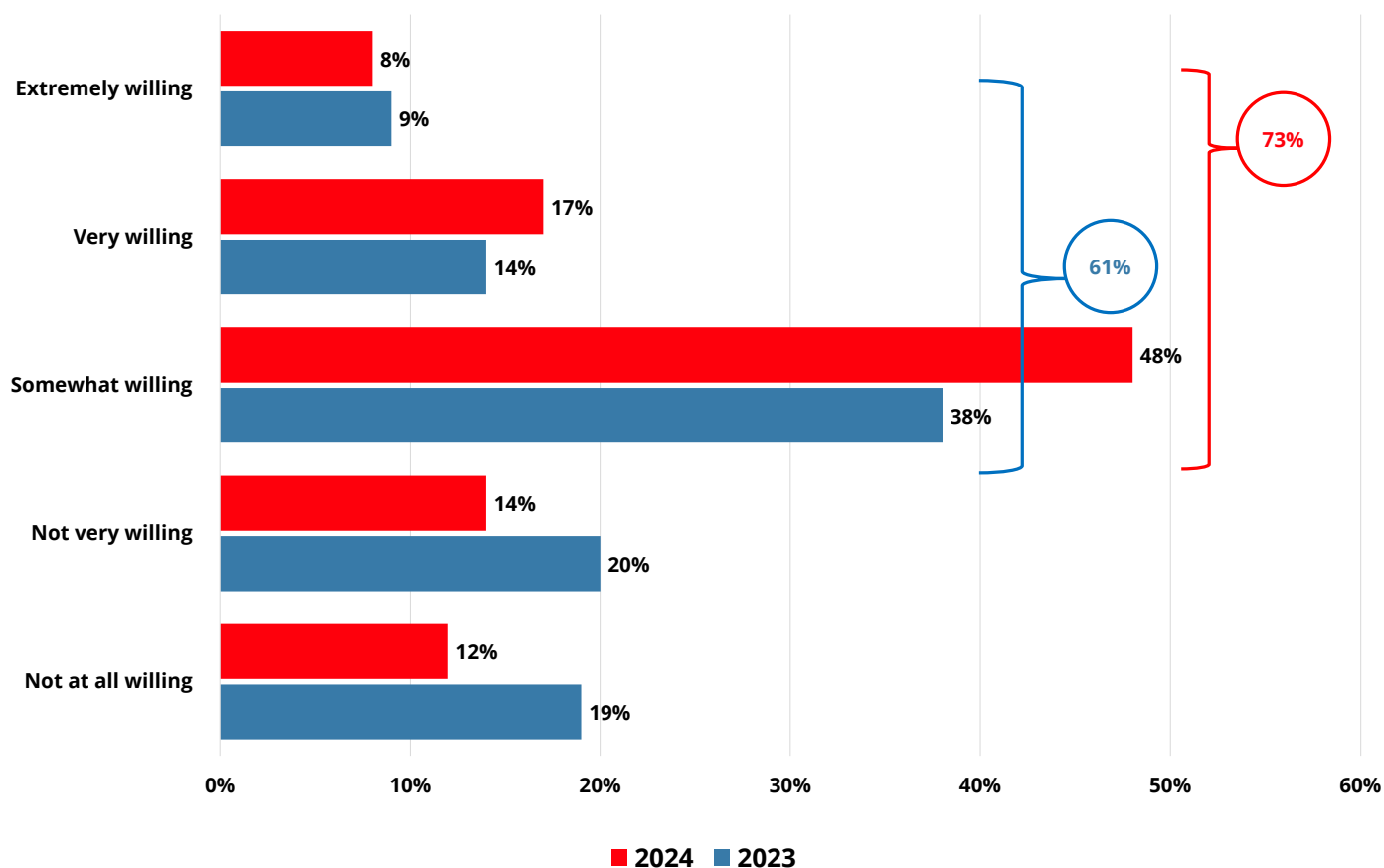
Almost twice as many Canadians agree that organizations should be able to use data as long as they safeguard people's personal information



How much do you agree with the following statement: In today's digital world, organizations should be able to use data to remain competitive as long as they safeguard people's privacy.

This value exchange relies on consumers receiving relevant advertising. We are no longer in a world where online users must wade through unappealing or irrelevant ads to find what they're looking for. Instead, consumers expect customized content from brands. Three quarters (73%) say they are "somewhat," "extremely" or "very" willing to receive a digital ad that is relevant to them personally, rather than a generic ad that may or may not be of interest. This is a remarkable 12% jump since 2023.

Consumers are willing to receive a digital ad that is relevant to them rather than a generic ad that may or may not be of interest

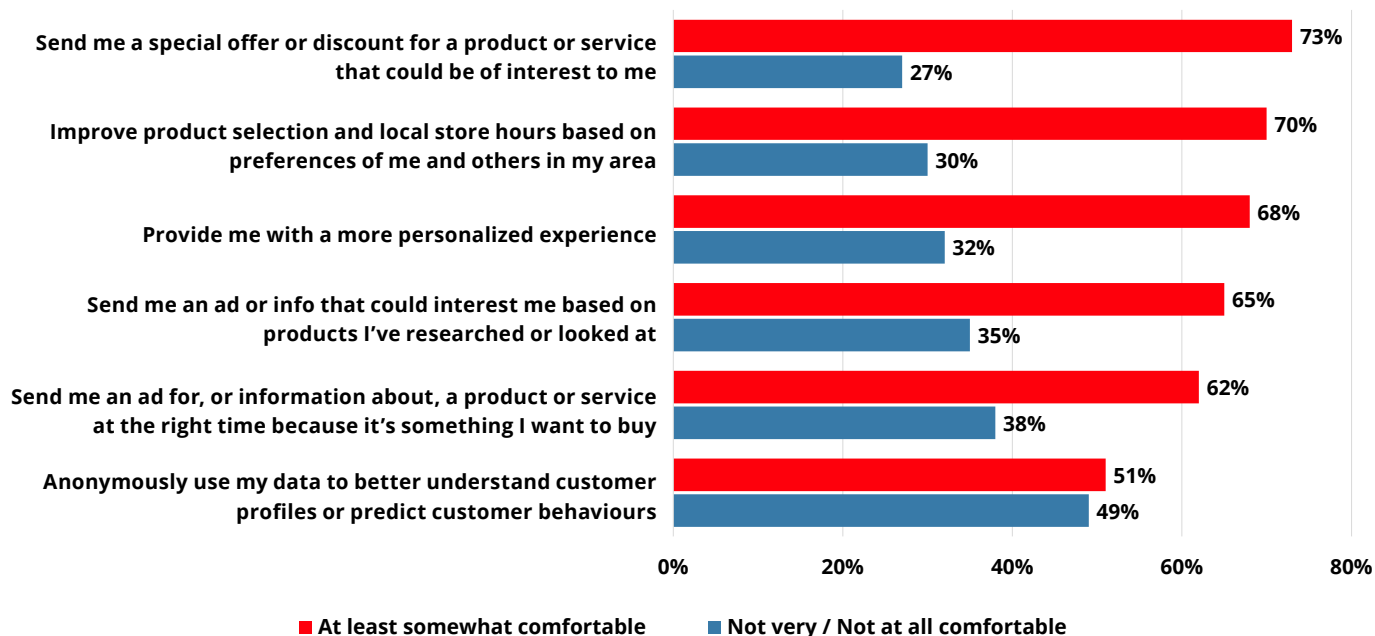


How willing are you to receive a digital ad that is relevant to you personally rather than a generic ad that may or may not be of interest to you?

Those who are not comfortable with targeted ads are the exception rather than the norm. Few consumers say they don't want to see ads based on their search activities and that they would rather see generic ads that may or may not be relevant to them.

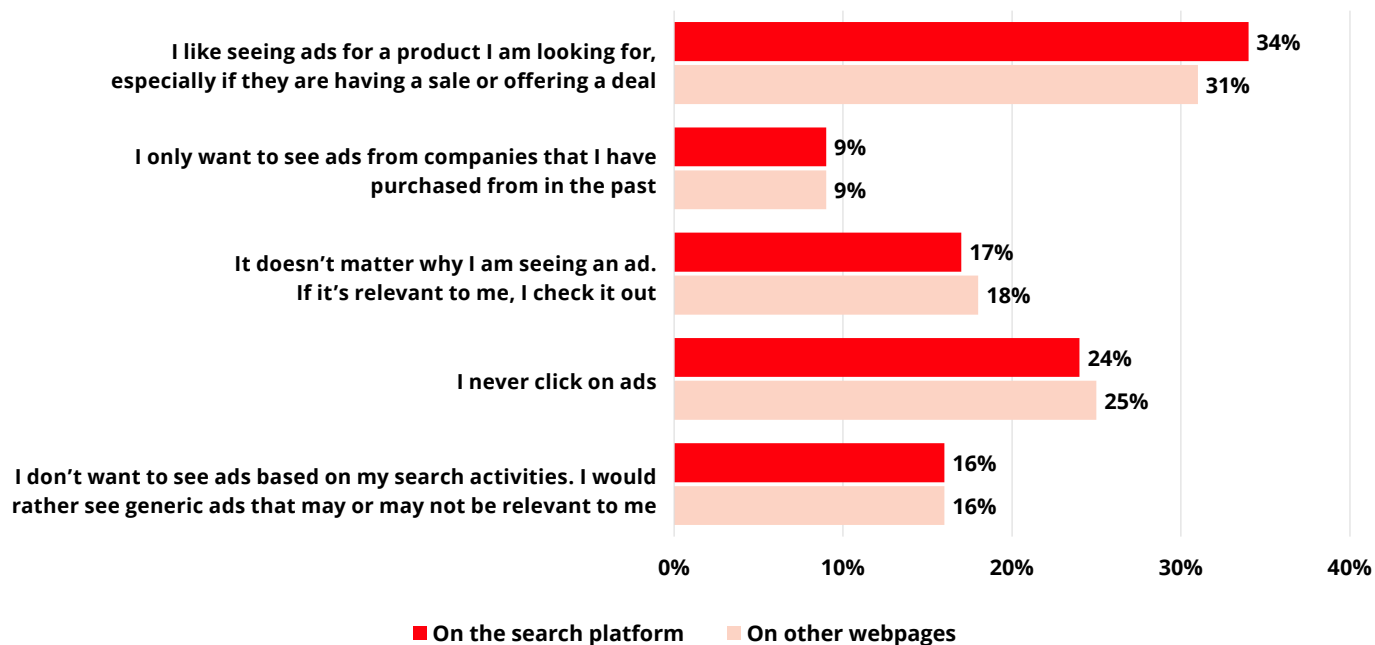
Most Canadians are comfortable with organizations using their personal information for a variety of purposes, such as sending them special offers or discounts that might interest them.

Most Canadians are comfortable having an organization use their personal information to improve their customer experience



How comfortable are you having a business/organization use your personal information to...

A third of Canadians like seeing ads for products they've searched for online, especially if they offer a discount. This is true whether the ads appear on a search platform or on other web pages

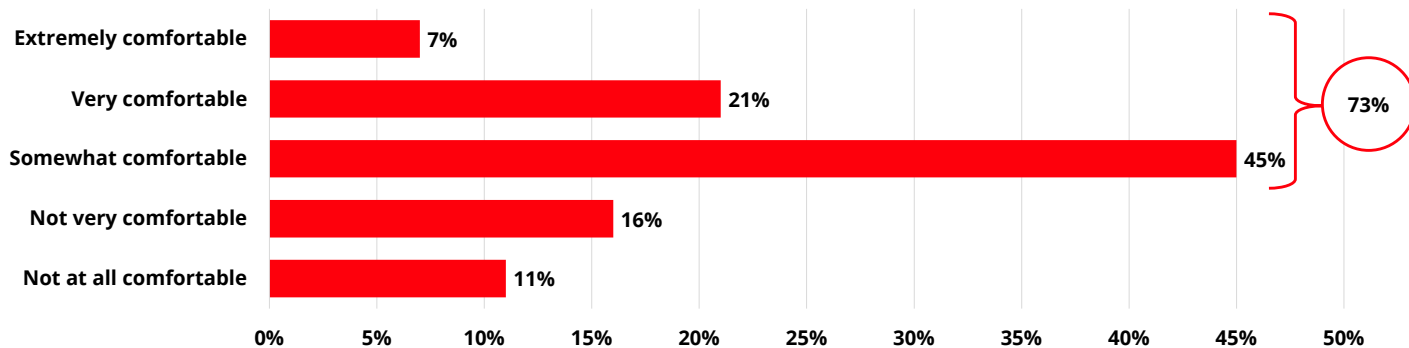


After you search for a product online, how do you feel about seeing ads for that product on the search platform?
After you search for a product online, how do you feel about seeing ads for that product on other web pages?

Consumers want more than just relevant information: they want to receive value for their data.

Consumers have become accustomed to receiving promotions and attractive pricing for products and services that interest them.

About three-quarters of Canadians are at least somewhat comfortable with organizations using their personal information to send them special offers or discounts that might interest them

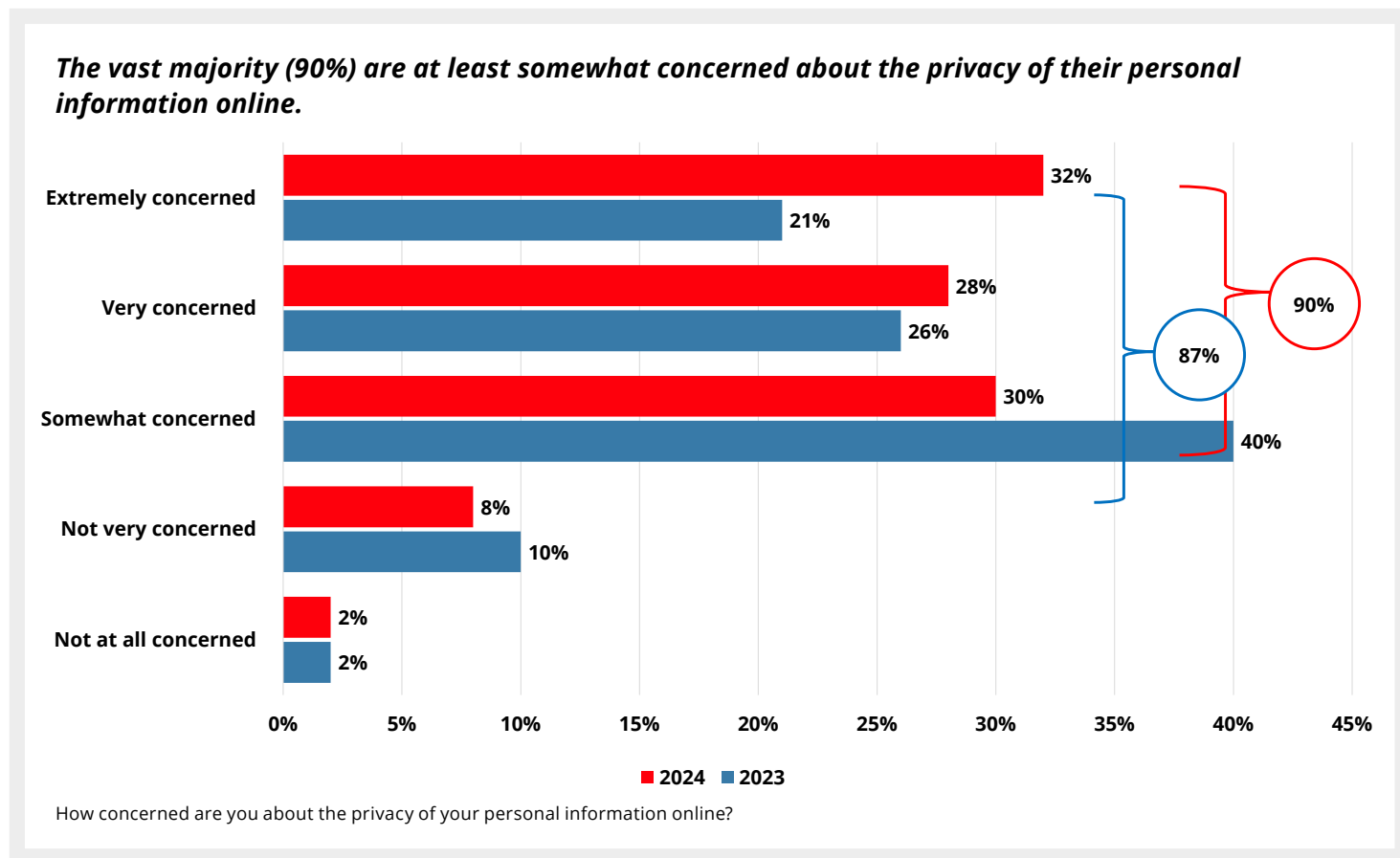


How comfortable are you to have a business/organization use your personal information to... send me a special offer or discount for a product or service that could be of interest to me.



Transparency and regulation improve trust

While consumers expect an online experience that is relevant to them, the vast majority (90%) are at least somewhat concerned about the privacy of their personal information online.



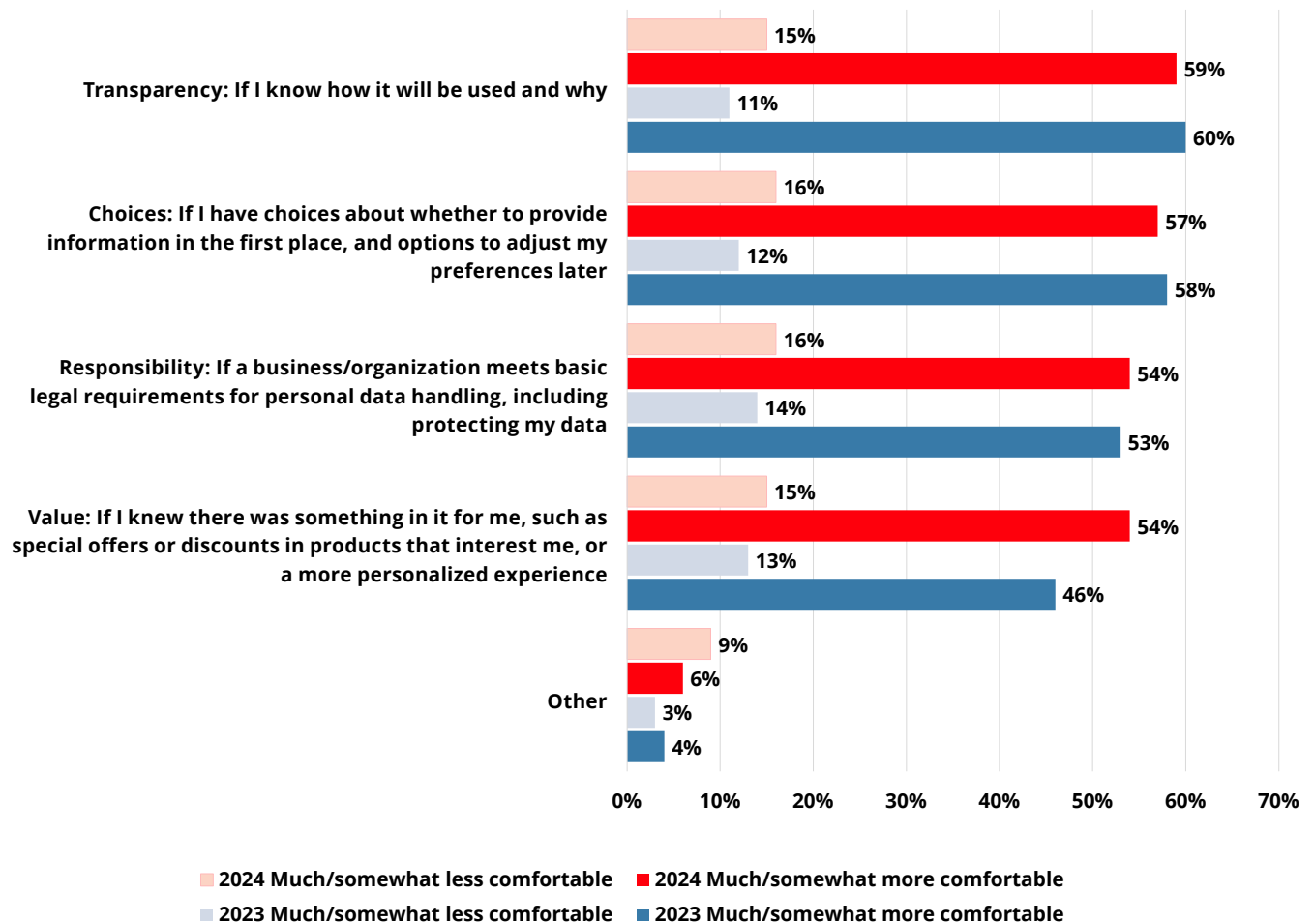
However, their greatest concerns relate to serious harms, such as identity theft, rather than advertising specifically (2023 data):

- Having their personal information stolen or misused by a bad actor, such as a hacker (53%)
- Having their information sold to another business/organization (15%)
- Having their information used to target ads and offers by a third party, without consent (12%)
- Having their information used to target ads and offers by a third party, with my consent (6%)
- Having their information used to target ads and offers by that business/organization (5%)

When consumers are informed transparently about how the information will be used, their comfort increases. Most respondents (59%) say they are more comfortable sharing their information if they know how and why their data is being used, and if they have a choice in providing that data and an option to change their preference later (57%). They are more comfortable having their personal information used to target ads and offers to them when they've given consent.

More than half (55%) are more comfortable if a business meets legal requirements for protecting data. Fifty-five per cent of Canadians feel comfortable if they know that "there is something in it for me, such as special offers or discounts in products that interest me, or a more personalized experience."

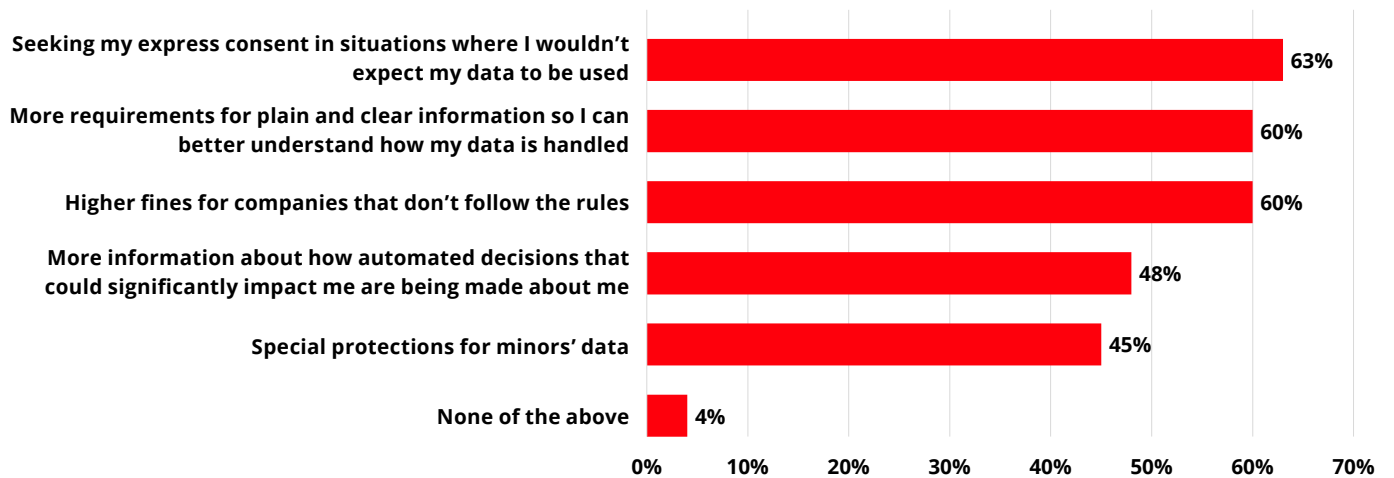
Canadians are more comfortable having their personal information used to target ads and offers to them when there is transparency, choice, responsibility and value



Businesses/organizations sometimes use information about you to advertise products and services that could be of interest to you. How much does each of the following affect how comfortable you are with companies using your information?

There are other factors that make consumers more comfortable sharing their information, such as the option to give express consent in certain situations, clear information, and higher fines when companies don't comply.

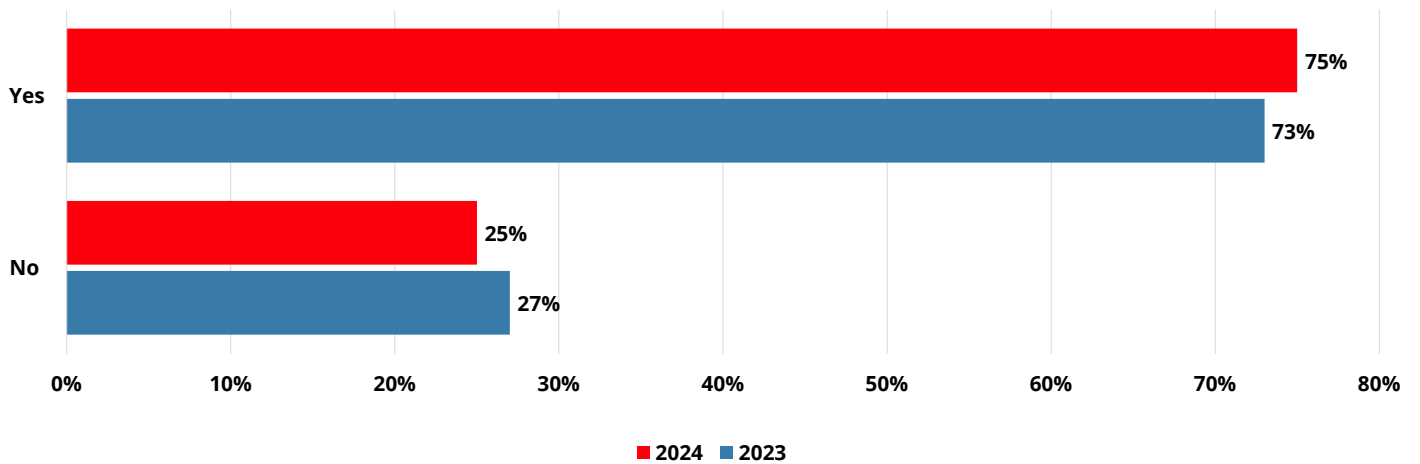
Canadians would be more comfortable sharing their data if our privacy law had stronger features



What aspects of a stronger privacy law would increase your comfort?

Three-quarters (75%) of Canadians say that stronger privacy laws would enhance their comfort in sharing data with businesses for marketing purposes, slightly up from 73% in 2023.

Most say that a stronger privacy law would increase their comfort in sharing their data with businesses/organizations for marketing purposes

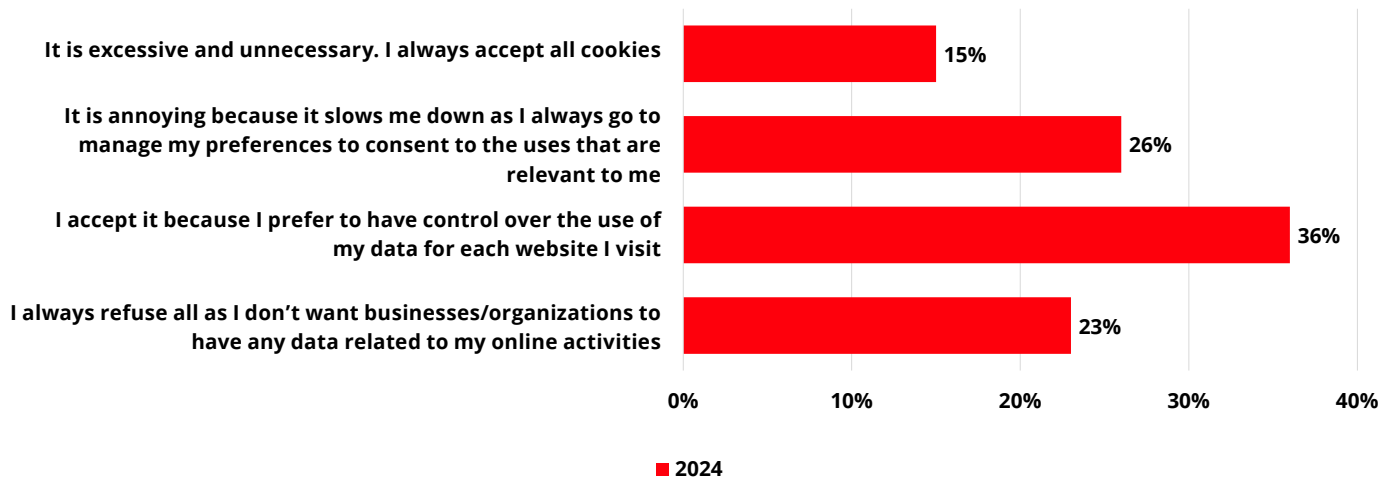


Do you think a stronger privacy law would increase your comfort in sharing your data with business/organizations for marketing purposes?

While privacy is a priority, some measures cause consent fatigue

Although most consumers have expressed an interest in privacy protection, there is growing frustration with the growing need to provide consent. A quarter (26%) of Canadians say that being asked for consent on every site is 'annoying' and time-consuming, as they must continuously manage their preferences to allow only relevant uses. Meanwhile, 15% feel that such measures are 'excessive and unnecessary,' opting to accept all cookies to avoid the hassle.

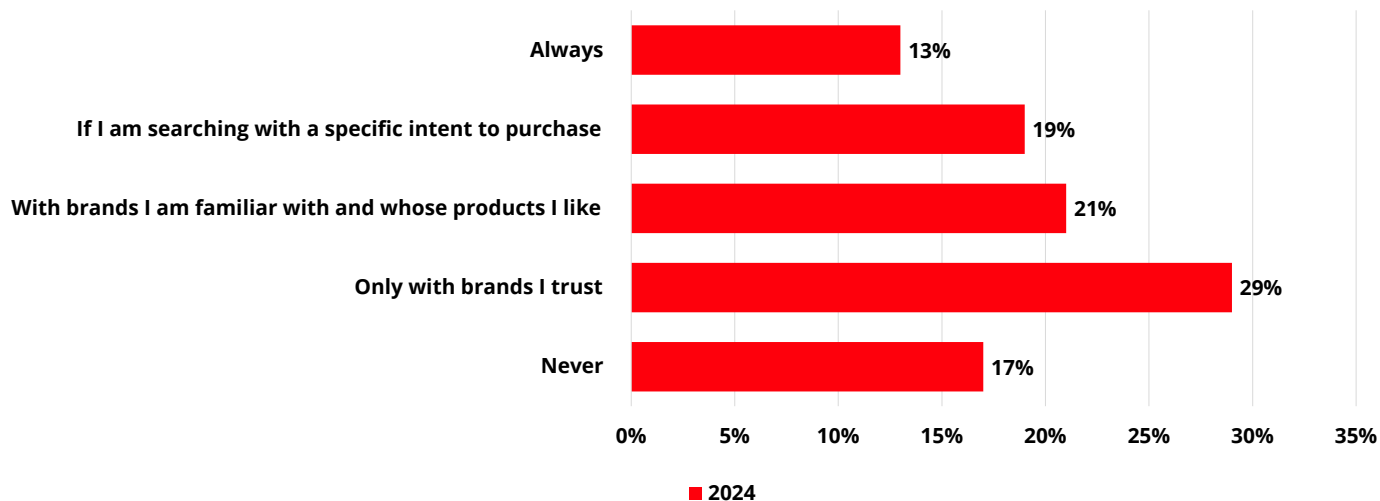
41% of Canadians object to having to provide consent on every website they visit, while 59% prefer to be given the choice



Increasingly, to comply with evolving law, businesses/organizations are required to obtain consumer consent for the use of cookies or other tracking technologies. How do you feel when every website you visit asks for your consent for a number of different uses?

Most consumers (82%) consent to the use of cookies or other tracking technologies to provide more relevant marketing, at least some of the time. In fact, only 17% say they never provide consent to the use of cookies or other tracking technologies in order to receive more relevant marketing, indicating a general openness to targeted marketing efforts.

Fewer than one-in-five Canadians never consent to cookies



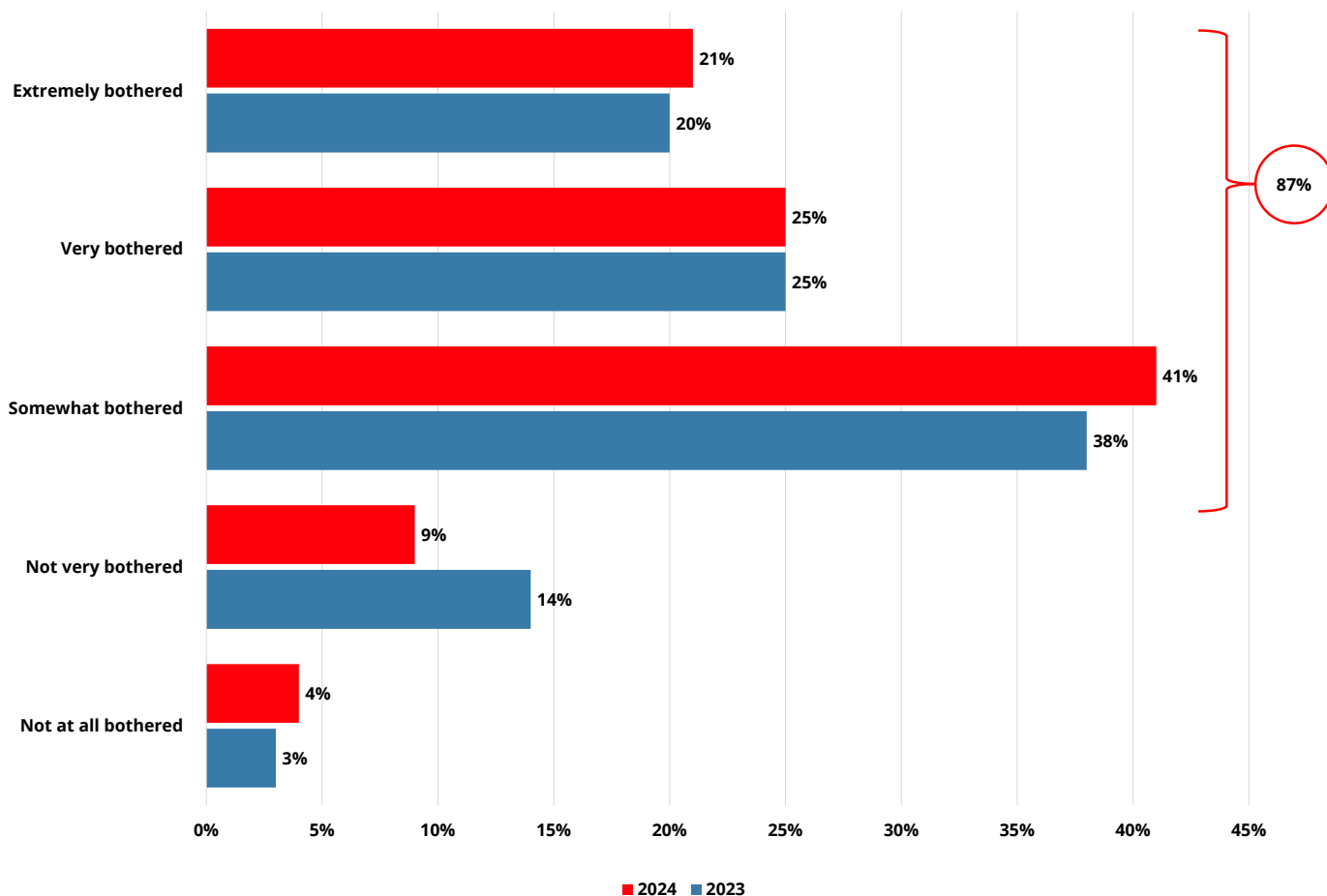
How likely are you to provide consent to the use of cookies or other tracking technologies to provide more relevant marketing to you?



Consumers are bothered by irrelevant communications

Consumers react negatively to irrelevant content. The majority (87%) say they are at least somewhat bothered when a business or organization sends or pushes irrelevant communications to them. Almost half (47%) are “very” or “extremely” bothered.

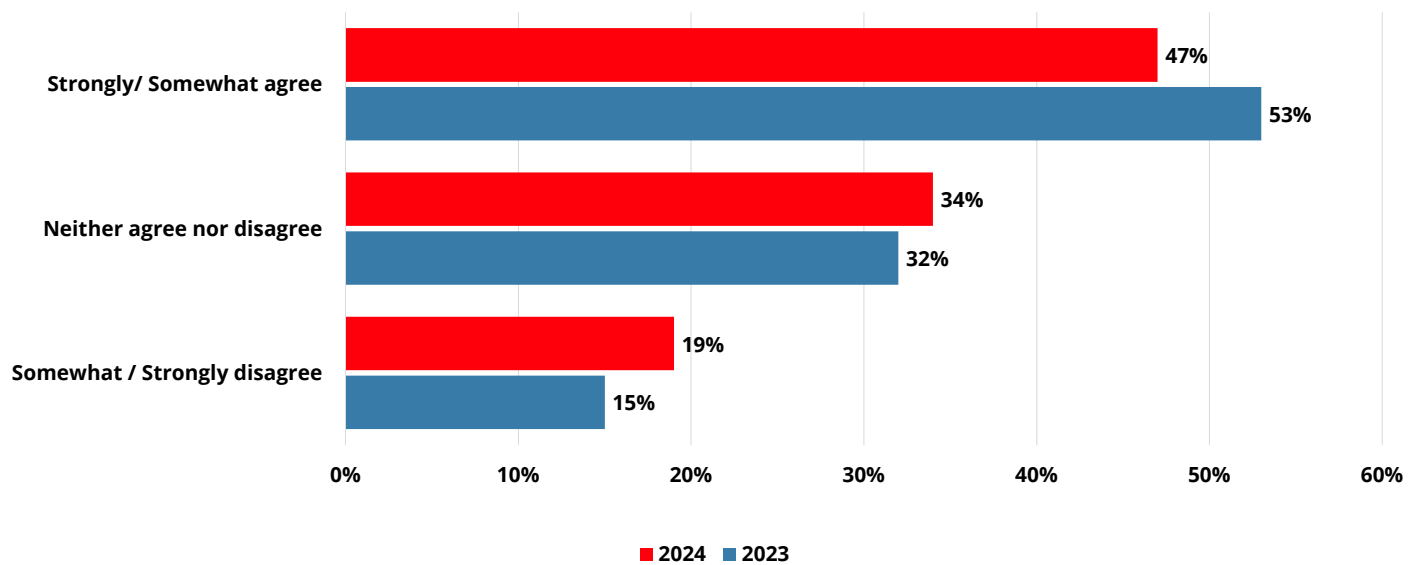
A strong majority (87%, up from 83% in 2023) are at least somewhat bothered when an organization sends them irrelevant information



How do you feel when a business/ organization sends or pushes irrelevant communications to you?

This reinforces consumers’ expectations to receive relevant information and offers. They are comfortable with brands using data to provide a more customized experience, such as improving product selection and local store hours based on the preferences of local customers (themselves included), or sending a relevant ad. **In fact, nearly half (47%) agree that it is “unacceptable” for an organization to send them ads that aren’t relevant to them given all the technology that’s available today.**

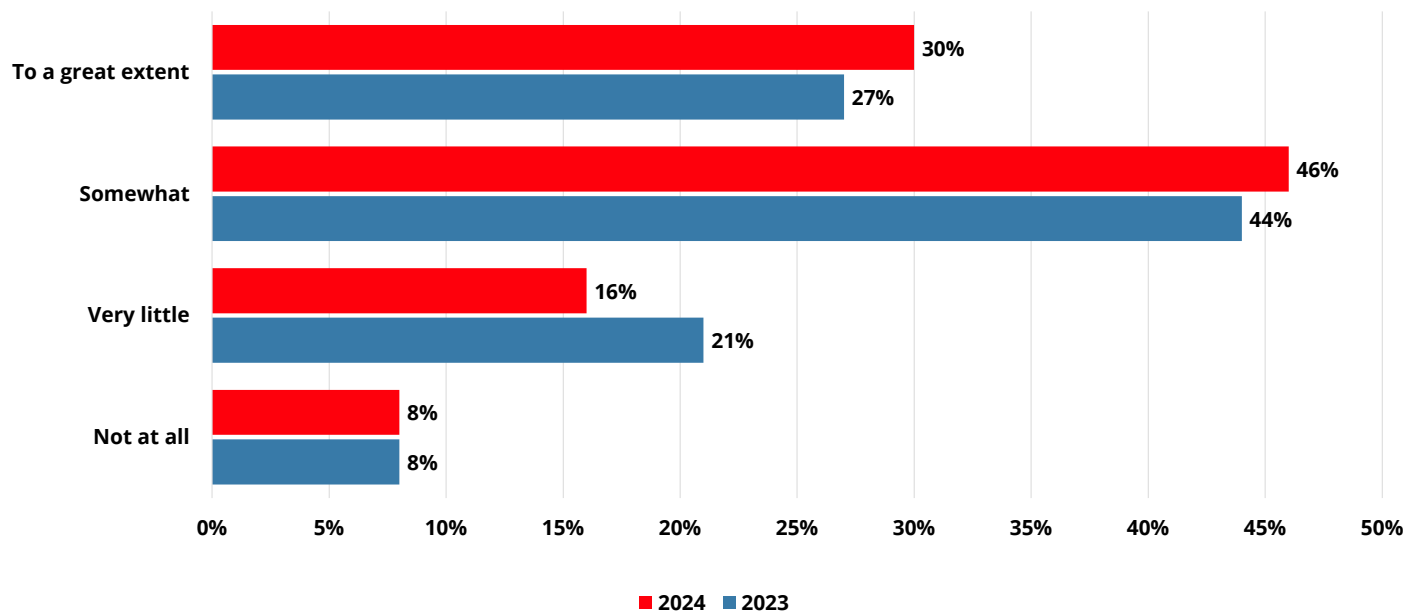
Almost half (47%) of Canadians agree that, with all the technology available today, it is unacceptable for an organization to send them ads that aren't relevant to them



How much do you agree with the following statement, with all the technology available today, it is unacceptable for a business/organization to send me ads that are not relevant to me.

Further, people lose trust in an organization when it sends them information about products and services that don't interest them.

The number of people who say they lose trust when the business/organization sends information about products and services that don't interest them is growing

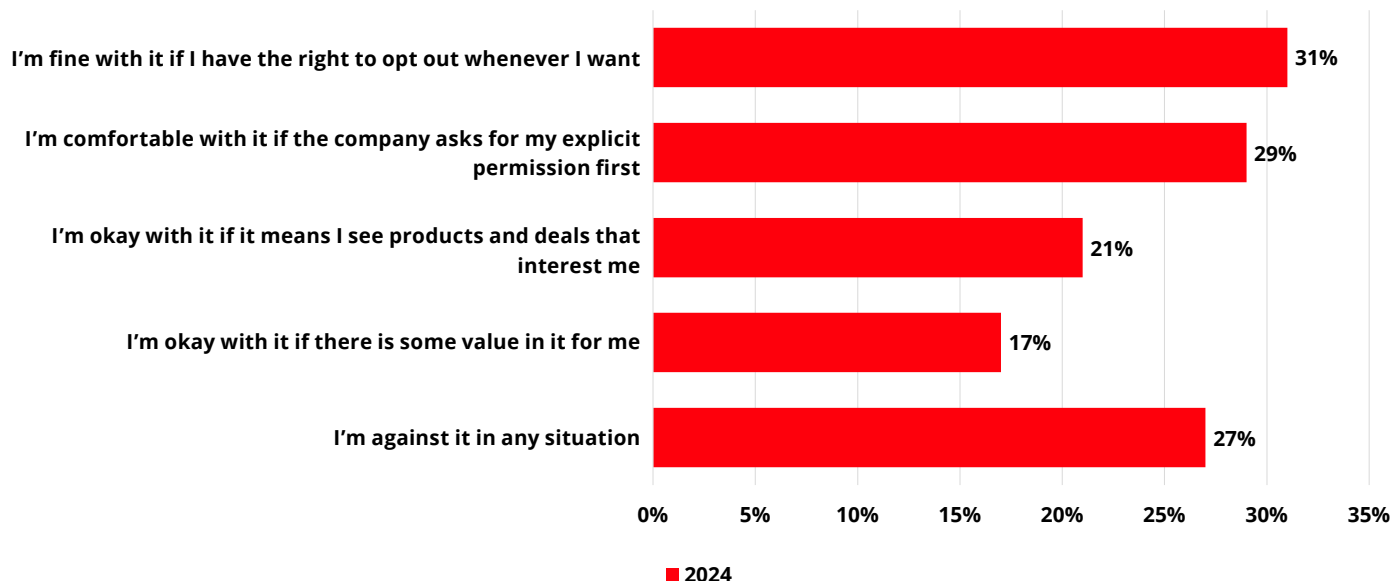


To what degree do each of the following situations lower your trust in a business/organization that is looking to market to you? When the business/organization sends me information about products and services that don't interest me.

Consumers are comfortable receiving targeted ads if protections are in place and if they receive a benefit

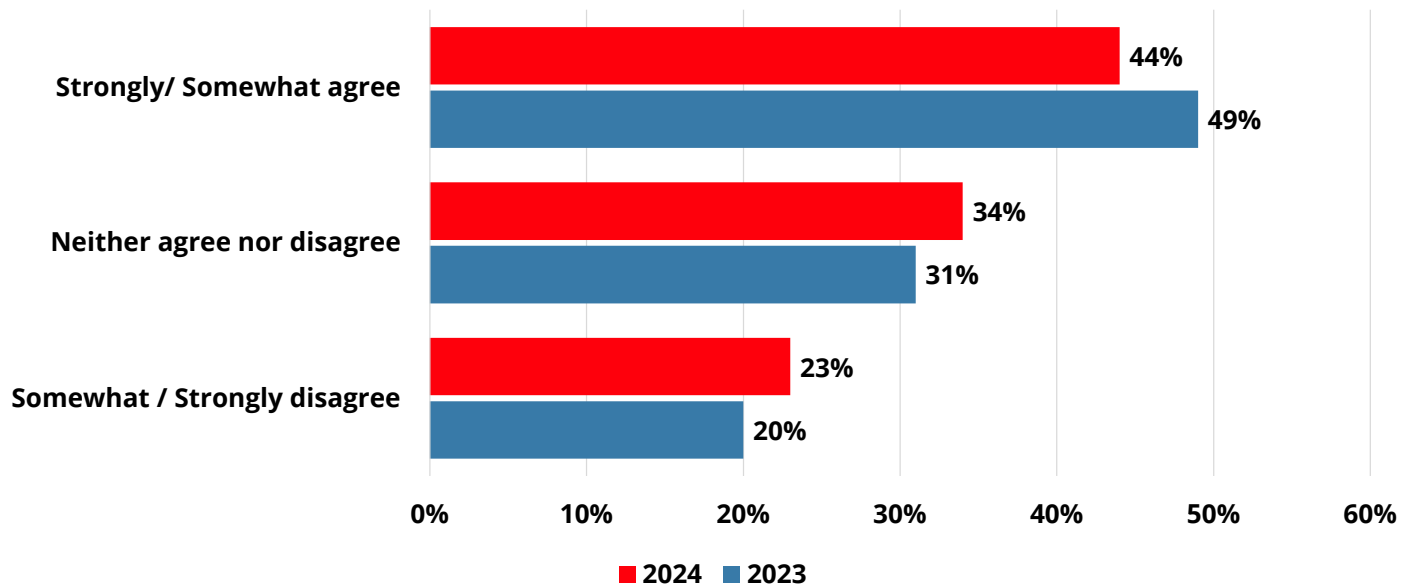
Given this, it's not a surprise that as long as companies aren't sharing personal data, there is nearly universal comfort with having them use consumer information to provide more relevant ads and offers, with some choice and protections in place. The types of protections consumers want include having the right to opt out whenever the consumer wants, the company asking for explicit permission first, if it means seeing products and deals of personal interest, and if there is some value in it for the consumer.

73% of Canadians are comfortable having companies leverage info to receive more relevant ads and offers as long as their PI isn't shared



How do you feel about companies leveraging the information they've collected about you to ensure you are receiving more relevant ads and offers from other brands, as long as they don't actually share your personal data?

Almost twice as many Canadians welcome ads about products or services that interest them, or that save them time or money, compared to those who don't welcome such ads.

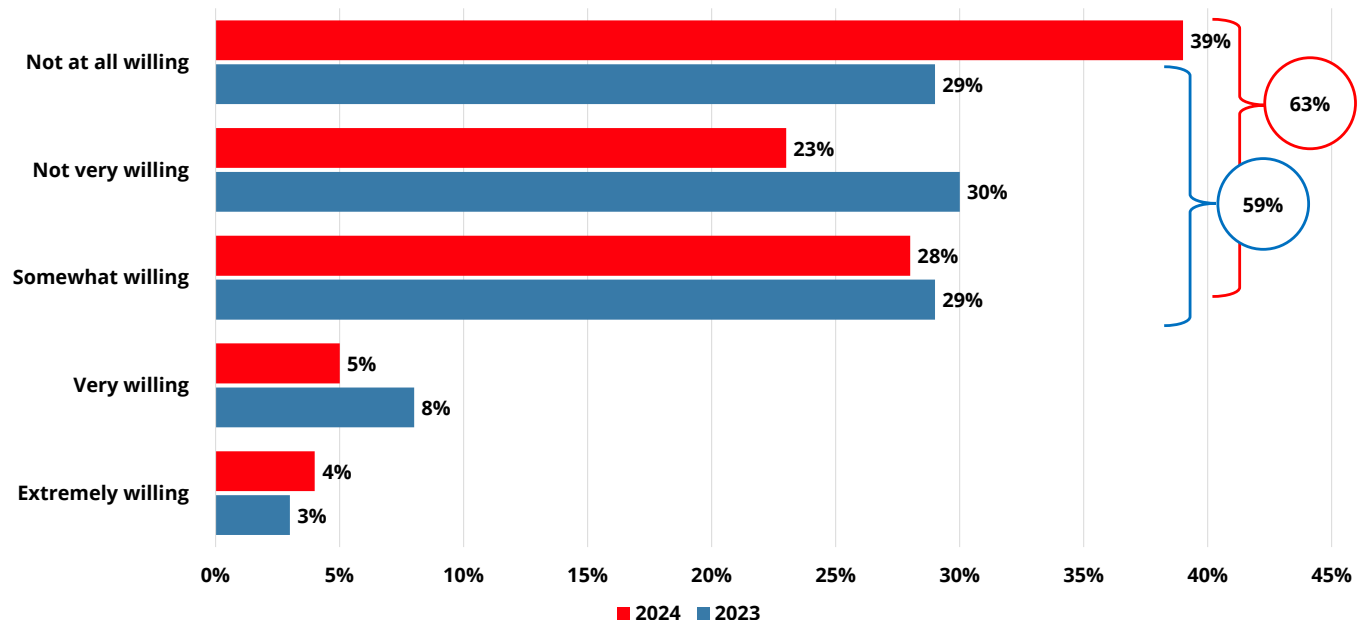


How much do you agree with the following statements? I welcome ads about products or services that interest me, or that save me time or money.

Paying for an ad-free experience

Almost two-thirds of Canadians (63%) are unwilling or not very willing to pay to remove ads from free platforms, while one-third (37%) are at least somewhat willing to pay. Only nine per cent say they would be very or extremely willing to pay for an ad-free experience.

Most Canadians are not willing to pay to remove ads from free platforms



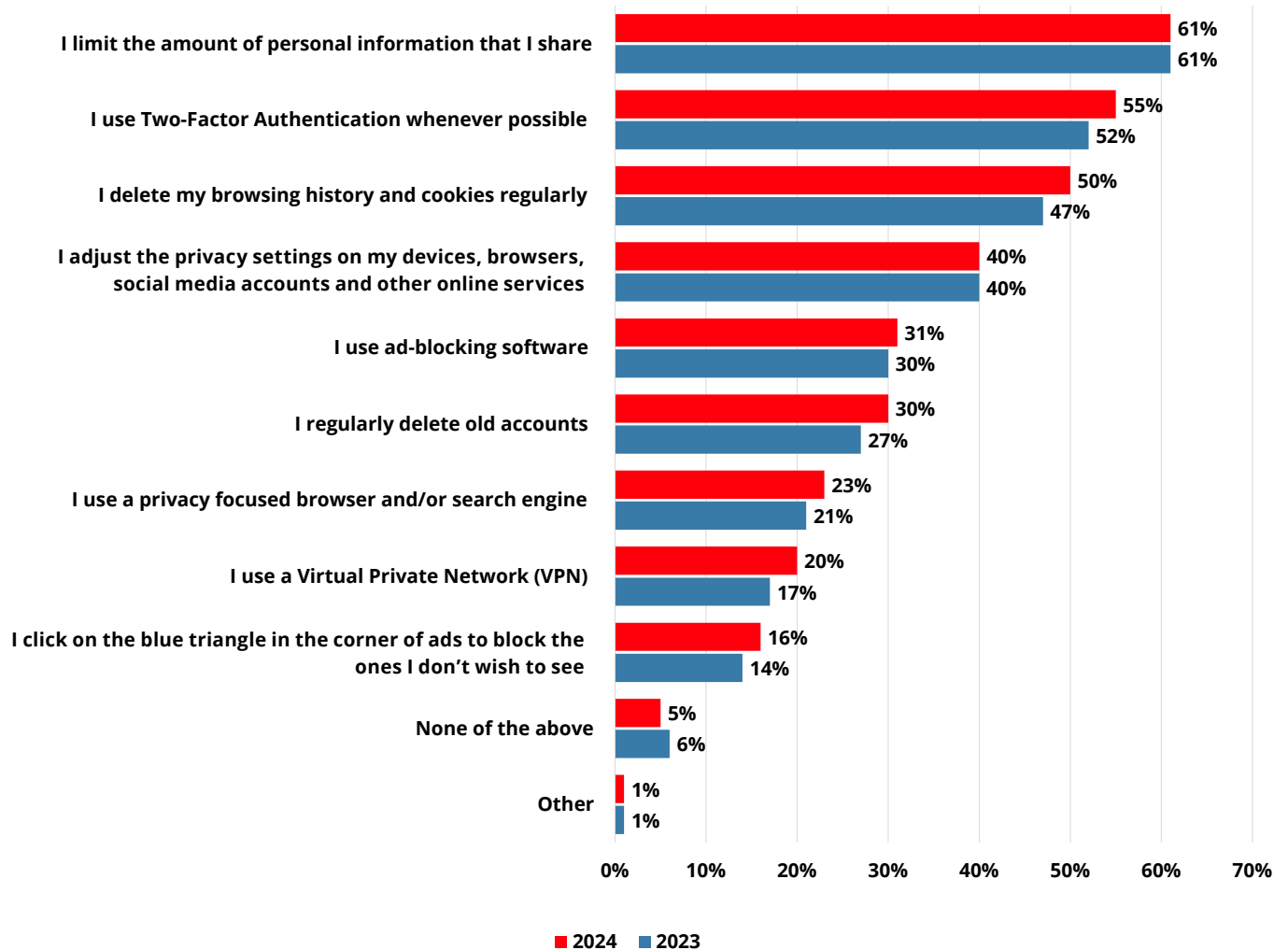
How willing would you be to pay to use platforms and sites that are currently offered to you for free, in exchange for not having to see ads on those sites?

Protecting privacy is a shared responsibility

Canadians continue to believe that protecting privacy is a shared responsibility. The vast majority (93%) believe that consumers have at least some responsibility to protect their own privacy. And, for the most part, people are increasing the ways they do so. The top three steps that consumers take are:

- Limiting the amount of personal information they share (61%)
- Using two-factor authentication whenever possible (55%)
- Deleting browsing history and cookies regularly (50%)

Canadians are taking steps to protect their privacy

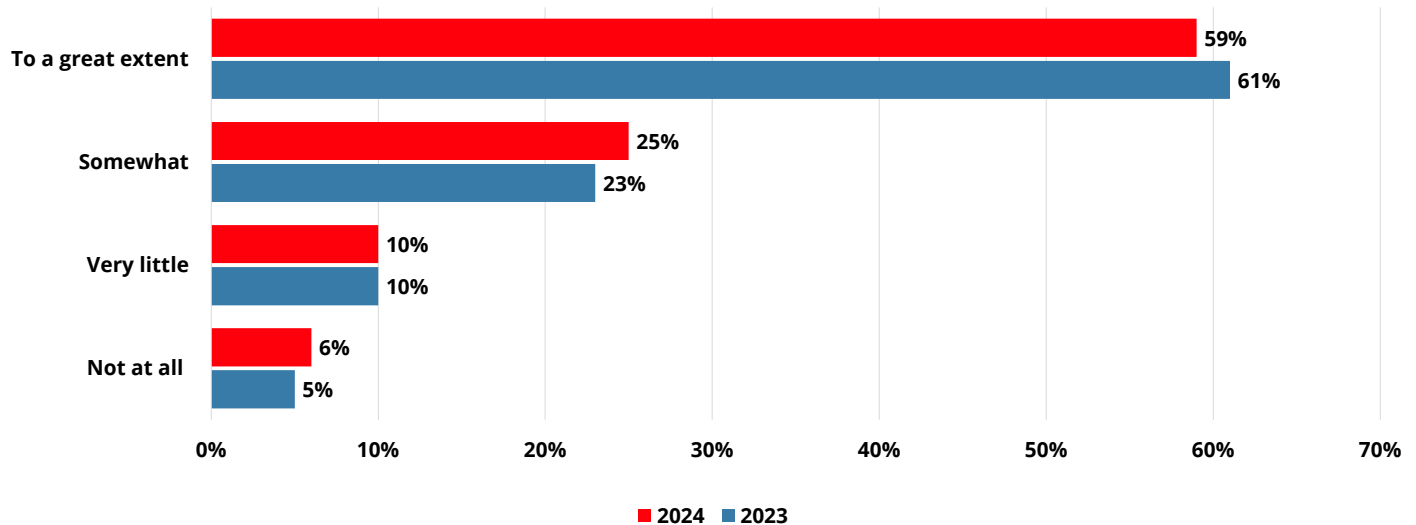


What steps do you take to protect your own privacy?

Organizations face consequences in the marketplace if they don't adequately protect personal information

When trust is lost, consumers may take their business elsewhere.

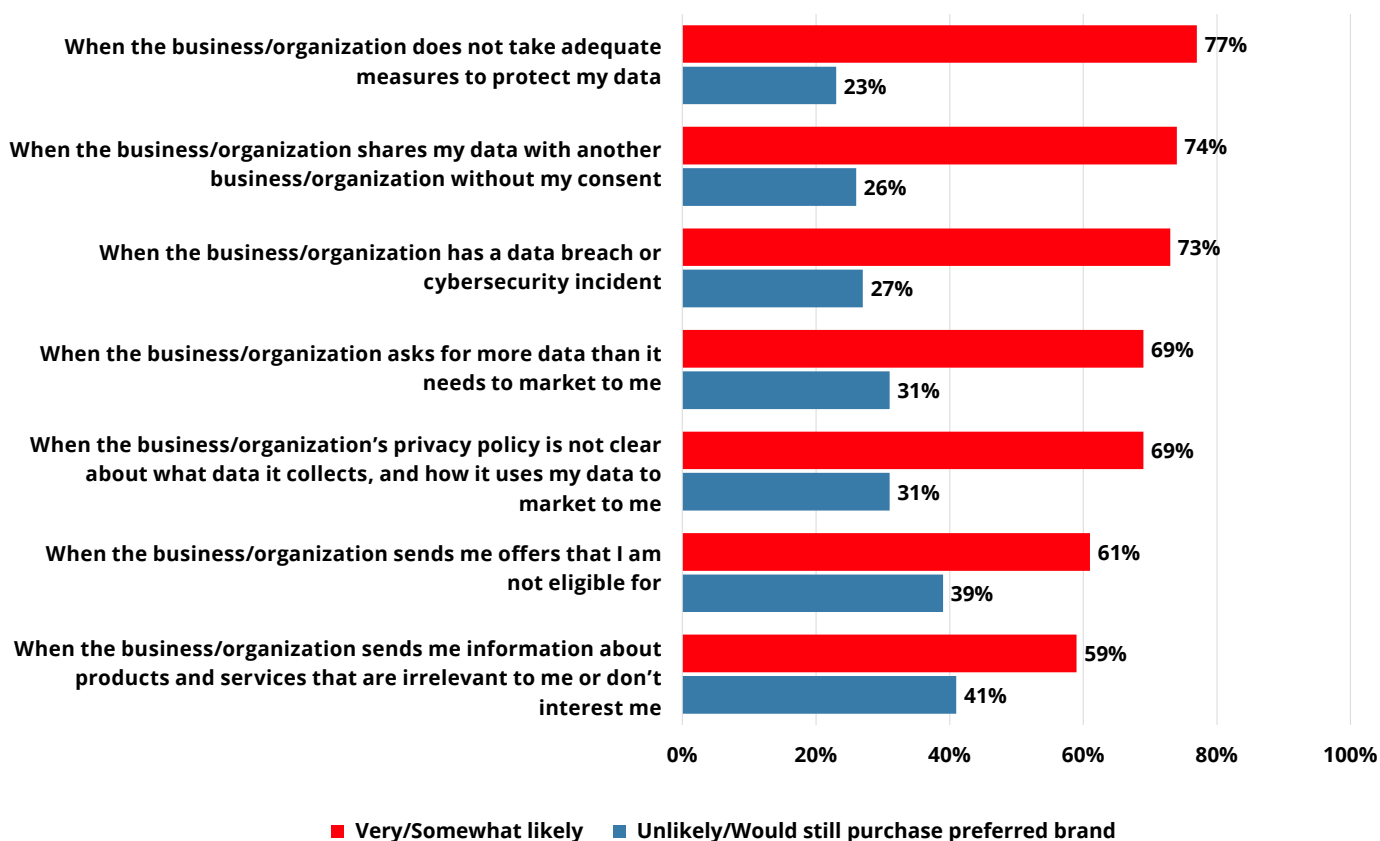
Canadians' trust in an organization drops significantly if the organization does not adequately protect their data



To what degree do each of the following situations lower your trust in a business/organization that is looking to market to you? When the business/organization shares my data with another business/organization without my consent.



Canadians say they will switch brands if the company does not protect their data or use it transparently



You've indicated that certain situations would lower your trust in a business/organization. In each of the following situations, how likely would you be to switch your purchase away from your preferred brand.



Research methodology

These findings are from a study released by Sago between November 6 to 8, among a random selection of 1,531 Canadian adults.

The results were weighted by education, age, gender, and region (and in Quebec, language) to match the population, according to Census data. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of this size has an estimated margin of error (which measures sampling variability) of +/- 2.5%, 19 times out of 20. Please note that the data has been rounded, which may result in slight discrepancies between the total percentage amounts and the data displayed.

Respondents could respond in either English or French. Excerpts from this release of findings should be properly attributed, with interpretation subject to clarification or correction.

About Sago

Sago is the global research and data partner that connects human answers to business questions. Combining a legacy of impact, global reach, and innovative spirit, Sago enables clients to solve business problems through extensive audience access and an adaptive range of qualitative and quantitative solutions.

About the Canadian Marketing Association

The CMA is the voice of marketing in Canada and our purpose is to champion marketing's powerful impact. We are the catalyst to help Canada's marketers thrive today, while building the marketing mindset and environment of tomorrow.

We provide opportunities for our members from coast to coast to develop professionally, to contribute to marketing thought leadership, to build strong networks, and to strengthen the regulatory climate for business success. Our Chartered Marketer (CM) designation signifies that recipients are highly qualified and up-to-date with best practices, as reflected in the Canadian Marketing Code of Ethics and Standards. We represent virtually all of Canada's major business sectors, and all marketing disciplines, channels and technologies. Our Consumer Centre helps Canadians better understand their rights and obligations.

For more information, visit thecma.ca

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