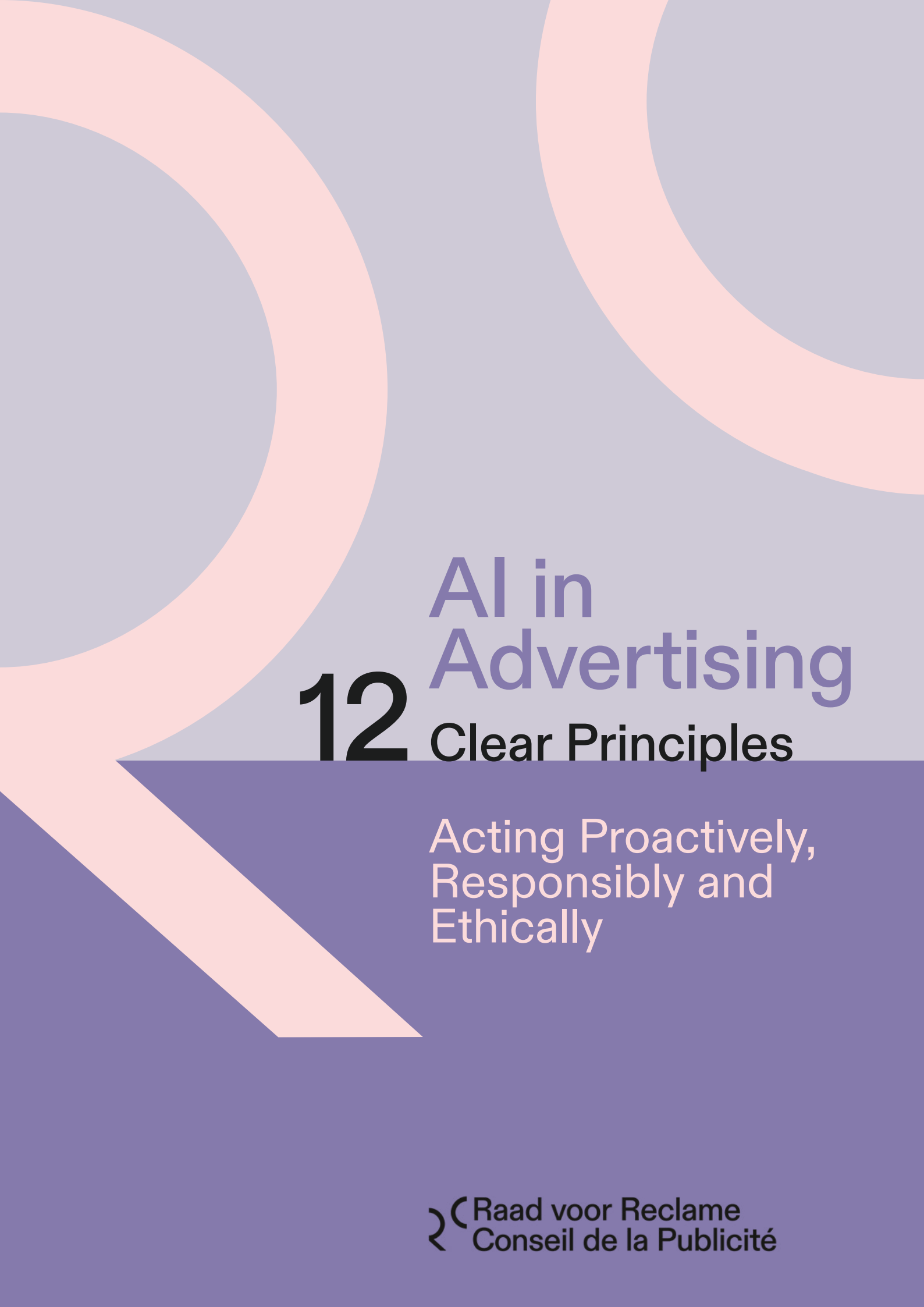




12 AI in Advertising

Clear Principles

Acting Proactively,
Responsibly and
Ethically

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is transforming the advertising industry, boosting efficiency, fuelling innovation and reshaping how brands grow and connect with people.

To harness these benefits while protecting and developing trust, the Belgian Advertising Council and its member associations* have developed this set of industry-wide guidelines.

Framed around 12 guiding principles, this document provides both direction and practical tools to ensure that AI is used ethically, transparently, effectively and with respect for consumers' rights. It recognises the evolving regulatory landscape, including the EU AI Act and the GDPR, while also encouraging the sector to go beyond compliance through self-regulation, continuous reflection, and active listening to the public and consumers.

With clear, contextual guidance, these guidelines help advertising professionals (brands, agencies, media partners and technology providers) balance innovation with integrity so that AI becomes a lever for long-term, responsible and positive growth.

As AI continues to evolve, these guidelines will be updated accordingly, ensuring they remain a dynamic and future-oriented resource for all actors in the advertising ecosystem.

** UBA (United Brands Association), ACC (Association of Communication Companies), BPX (Belgian Publishing Experience), AEA (Association des Exploitants d'Affichage), VIA (Association of Audiovisual Media), BAM (Belgian Association of Marketing), UMA (United Media Agencies)*



Taking brands further



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1 Human at the core

The advertising sector promotes ensuring that AI in advertising operates under meaningful human oversight and always serves as a means to amplify human authenticity, originality, creative thinking, and operational excellence.

Why

AI presents a major opportunity to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and growth across the advertising landscape. To fully benefit from its potential, meaningful human oversight remains essential. Human responsibility ensures that AI is applied in ways that respect legal and ethical standards, align with brand values and reflect consumer expectations. When guided by human creativity, expertise and accountability, AI becomes a tool to amplify authenticity, reinforce trust and keep brands relevant in a fast-evolving landscape.

How

- Implement and apply human checks and processes to ensure that automated action and content respect legal norms, ethical standards, societal and brand values, and are purpose-driven.
- Promote an organisational culture that prioritises and safeguards human originality and ensures AI tools are used to enhance creative thinking and operational excellence, rather than replace them.
- Recognise that authentic human connection remains valuable even as AI capabilities expand.
- Develop clear, organisation-wide AI standards and best practices to guide decision-making.
- When working with agents, define strict perimeter limits and latitude of autonomy.

2 AI literacy & governance

The advertising sector commits to fostering AI literacy and promotes strategic coordination across departments. Professionals will receive regular training, while a cross-functional approach will guide responsible AI implementation and use.

Why

To harness the new horizons for the advertising industry offered by AI, all professionals must be empowered with the right knowledge and mindset. Professionals must understand their mechanics, risks and limits. At the same time, siloed decisions can lead to misalignment, inefficiencies or legal/ethical blind spots. Breaking the siloes ensures diverse perspectives, marketing, legal, creative, IT, procurement, collaboration to mitigate risks such as ethical misjudgements, legal non-compliance or inefficient AI applications.

How

- Provide ongoing education and training tailored to each department's needs, enhancing cross-team understanding and critical thinking around AI.
- Facilitate proactive discussions on ethical considerations, compliance requirements, and societal impacts to ensure responsible and strategic AI use across all workflows.
- Engage external partners in this process, ensuring their alignment and understanding of the role of AI and the implications for joint initiatives.
- Regularly convene stakeholders from various departments to assess AI use cases, share insights and align on implementation strategies.

3 Embrace transparency

The advertising sector promotes disclosure in AI-generated or manipulated content, especially involving depictions of real people and virtual interaction, and the explainability of AI usage.

Why

As AI systems increasingly generate advertising content from visuals to copy to chat interactions, consumers may struggle to distinguish between human and synthetic output. This creates a risk of deception, particularly when AI-generated content simulates human presence, authority or authenticity. Transparent disclosure builds audience trust and ensures alignment with EU requirements on transparency and fairness. As consumers will increasingly value brands that are honest about their technological capabilities and limitations, transparency becomes a competitive differentiator and ethical imperative.

How

- Those generating or manipulating texts, audio, or visual content that would falsely appear to be authentic or truthful and featuring depictions of people, who appear to say or do things that they did not, for example, by deepfakes, shall disclose in an appropriate, timely, clear, and visible manner in their communication that the content has been artificially generated or manipulated.
- Label virtual interactions: chatbots, avatars or AI assistants should identify themselves as non-human from the outset.
- Where disclosure is necessary, use consistent wording. Examples: “AI-generated image,” “Written with AI assistance,” “This is an AI-powered assistant.” Align labels with the level of AI involvement (assistive, augmented, autonomous).
- Embed transparency early. Decide during campaign planning how and where disclosures will appear – in captions, disclaimers, audio or UI labels.
- Ensure AI is not used to create, amplify or spread false, misleading or deceptive content, either intentionally or inadvertently.
- Ensure that AI systems’ operations can be traced and explained to the relevant stakeholders (whether internal, regulators or the public). All automated decisions – such as audience targeting or dynamic ad creation – should be accompanied by records of how and why those decisions were made.

4

Think inclusively

The advertising sector commits to ensuring balanced, diverse and inclusive output and that AI implementation and use take into account local market dynamics and cultural values.

Why

AI models are trained on large data sets that may contain embedded social, cultural or demographic biases. Integrating diversity, inclusion and cultural sensitivity and bias detection into AI processes helps mitigate these risks and supports the creation of content and interaction that aligns with brand values, societal expectations and audience diversity.

How

- Audit AI inputs, outputs and tools for biased or exclusionary patterns, especially around gender, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.
- Diversify creative and approval teams to ensure that those shaping prompts, reviewing outputs and approving content reflect the diversity of the intended audience.
- Adapt global AI solutions to reflect diverse cultural contexts rather than applying one-size-fits-all approaches.
- When possible, deploy AI to identify needs and support inclusion, for instance using data to detect under-served audiences, improve accessibility or deliver supportive public messaging.

5 Protect vulnerable groups

The advertising sector commits to safeguarding vulnerable individuals and groups from exploitation or manipulation by AI systems. Extra care will be taken in sensitive domains and for vulnerable audiences, especially children.

Why

AI can help brands better understand consumers needs and behaviour but it can also detect signs of vulnerability, such as emotional distress, financial hardship or developmental stages. Without proper oversight, this can lead to targeting that is ethically questionable. Children, in particular, may lack the ability to critically assess advertising or resist persuasive techniques. Protecting these groups ensures AI is used responsibly and in line with legal and societal expectations.

How

- Prohibit AI-driven tactics that exploit signs of vulnerability, such as fear-based messaging, urgency pressure or developmental stages or emotional manipulation.
- Implement stricter review and approval processes for AI-driven campaigns in sensitive domains (e.g., health, body image, finance, education).
- Comply with child protection laws and the GDPR, especially regarding consent, data minimisation and persuasive techniques that can bypass developmental understanding (e.g. gamified ads, synthetic influencers).

6 Consider environmental impact

Environmental sustainability and the proper running of AI systems should be encouraged. The advertising sector shall take the necessary measures, if any, to reduce environmental impact.

Why

Sustainable initiatives are positively received by the public. When they're concrete with authenticity, they strengthen brand trust, brand reputation and audience engagement. Some systems, especially generative ones, require significant computing power. By using them in a targeted and thoughtful way, we avoid wasting resources, reduce our environmental footprint, and show that innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand.

How

- Use AI purposefully and strategically. Follow the “right tool for the right job” principle to prevent unnecessary processing and avoid generating redundant content.
- Avoid excessive content production driven by automation capabilities. Set clear limits on iterations, versions and asset volumes.
- Promote use of AI infrastructure powered by renewable energy, ideally certified according to European energy performance standards and take into account their environmental governance and traceability.
- Streamline AI workflows to reduce redundancy, including more efficient prompting, simpler output structures and tighter approval processes.

7 Privacy is sacred

The advertising sector is aware that AI systems based on the use of personal data must always be developed, trained, used and deployed in compliance with the GDPR and Belgian Privacy legislation, including respect for privacy, quality and integrity of data, and data access.

Why

Ensuring the confidentiality and security of user information is essential to building trust and complying with current regulations. AI systems in advertising often rely on personal and behavioural data, sometimes inferred, sometimes sensitive. Without strong data governance, this can lead to unauthorised profiling, function creep, or cross-use of data beyond its original purpose. Such missteps can breach the GDPR, undermine consumer trust and damage brand reputation. Responsible data practices are essential to ensure legality, fairness and ethical AI use in advertising.

How

- Apply privacy-by-design principles throughout the AI lifecycle, including in data collection, system training, deployment and user interaction. This includes limited data access, anonymisation or pseudonymisation where feasible and clearly defining the purpose of use with a Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETs) approach.
- Ensure transparency in how AI systems process personal data. Make privacy notices clear, specific and user-friendly. Be able to communicate transparently with consumers: e.g. provide clear disclosures or Q&As about how an AI tool personalises content.
- Hold partners and AI agents to the same privacy standards, including in data sharing, tool integration and AI system configuration. Remain aware that AI systems can generate or infer new personal data about individuals, even when such data was not explicitly provided (e.g. predicting interests, health status or emotional state based on behaviour). These inferred data points may qualify as personal data under the GDPR.
- Wherever possible and in the interest of consumer protection, use AI solutions operated under European legal jurisdiction, with servers located in Europe and fully subject to the GDPR and the AI Act.

8

Respect rights

The advertising sector commits to respecting intellectual property rights and personality rights, including image, voice and likeness when using AI technologies. AI-generated content must not infringe on third-party works or imitate individuals without explicit authorisation.

Why

Generative AI tools can create content that depicts or closely resembles copyrighted works or real individuals. This may raise legal and ethical risks for advertising, from unlicensed use of creative materials to infringements on voice, image or likeness. Misuse can lead to lawsuits, takedowns or public backlash. Responsible use of AI and human control requires respect for intellectual property (IP) and the rights of all individuals represented or mimicked.

How

- Where possible, review AI-generated content for potential infringement of copyrights, trademarks or personal rights, including names, voices, likenesses and styles. Keep prompt logs when possible and involve human reviewers and legal experts where needed or if the output is questionable.
- Use tools trained on licensed, public-domain or explicitly authorised data sets. Assess the potential risk of using platforms with unclear training data.
- Secure contractual consent before using AI to replicate any identifiable individual's likeness, voice or persona, especially for artists, influencers or public figures. Contracts should define scope, duration, rights of revocation and remuneration terms.
- Avoid mimicking distinctive artistic styles or brand aesthetics without authorisation, even if the output is technically 'synthetic'.

9 Keep monitoring

The advertising sector supports a culture of continuous innovation, critical reflection and assessment in their AI applications, ensuring their technology is deployed safely, legally and ethically, thereby contributing to a trusted and secure digital environment.

Why

AI technologies in advertising operate in fast-changing environments. As models interact with new data or user behaviours, their performance and impact can shift over time. Regular monitoring helps maintain alignment with the intended purpose. It ensures systems continue to operate within legal, ethical and brand-safe boundaries, enabling early detection of issues, better adaptation and sustained trust in how AI contributes to advertising objectives.

How

- For each AI system used in advertising, assess its risk category under the EU AI Act (e.g. minimal, limited, high). This informs the depth and frequency of required oversight and the need for conformity assessments or transparency duties.
- AI performance can evolve as input data or user contexts shift. Establish continuous monitoring processes to identify any drift, especially in systems that learn or adapt over time.
- Periodically verify that training and operational data sets remain current, accurate, balanced and relevant to the intended purpose. Flag outdated or biased data before it leads to harm.
- Where possible, keep records, data and documents for how AI systems are developed, trained, deployed, and used and be ready for auditing

10 Ensure fair competition and compensation

The advertising sector encourages fair and equitable use of AI in the workplace. AI will not lead to exploitative practices or diminish creative value. Contributions of both humans and machines will be transparently recognised.

Why

AI can reshape how work is produced and distributed across the advertising ecosystem. When used properly, it drives productivity away from less value-added work as adaptations towards meaningful creative, media expert and journalist contributions. When misused, it can disrupt fair collaboration, marginalise creative and journalist contributions or obscure the roles of human and machine effort.

How

- Ensuring that the deployment of AI can lead to productivity in the lower end of the funnel, like adaptations, that can be reinvested into breakthrough creativity.
- Compensation structures and workload assessments should reflect fair market values so that AI is used to enhance expertise, creativity and efficiency.
- Fair competition also involves transparency in how AI contributes to outcomes, ensuring credit is appropriately distributed among human and machine contributions in agency and media.

11 Be prepared for errors

The advertising sector encourages the development of incident response protocols that include legal, ethical and communication expertise.

Why

AI-related incidents, such as biased targeting, privacy breaches, deepfake misuse or reputational harm from flawed outputs, can escalate quickly and affect individuals, brands or entire campaigns. Without structured response protocols, organisations may react too slowly, uncoordinated or without accountability, increasing both the damage and the loss of public trust.

How

- Where possible, establish clear internal processes for detecting, escalating and resolving incidents related to AI, such as discrimination, misinformation, data misuse or IP infringement.
- If a breach affects individuals (e.g. personal data breach, unauthorised likeness reproduction), inform them clearly and promptly. Comply with GDPR notification duties and the EU AI Act.
- Establish audit trails and conduct periodic AI audits: independent reviews of algorithms to ensure they are functioning as intended and respecting policies.

12

Collaborate transparently

The advertising sector promotes transparent collaboration across the value chain regarding AI use and contracts will include AI clauses.

Why

AI offers huge potential across the advertising value chain but only when everyone involved understands how it's being used. When partners collaborate openly, they manage risks early, align expectations and ensure outputs are fair, legal and ethical. Clear communication and well-defined agreements support better decisions, stronger relationships and campaigns that deliver value.

How

- Partners should communicate clearly about the AI tools, models and methods they use.
- Contracts should define mutual rights and obligations regarding AI use, including disclosure duties, approval rights, IP control & responsibilities, IP treatment on the output and remediation paths in case of error or harm.
- Jointly define who owns AI-generated outputs, how usage rights are shared and what happens when human input is layered onto machine-generated elements.
- Where multiple partners or agents exchange data or AI components, ensure that data use permissions, retention periods and model interactions are clearly governed.

Main sources

- [The AI Act \(Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1689 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence\)](#)
- [The General Data Protection Regulation \(Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679\)](#)
- [ICC Advertising and Marketing Communications Code, International Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [UBA – ACC Guidelines on artificial intelligence & communication 2024](#)
- [Fedma / BAM, Ethical AI Powered Marketing Charter](#)

Glossary

Advertising [7]

“Advertising” or “advertisement” means any form of marketing communications carried by the media, usually in return for payment or other valuable consideration.

Agentic AI

AI systems that operate with goal-oriented behaviour and can initiate actions without direct human prompting in real time. These systems can perceive their environment, make autonomous decisions and execute complex tasks based on objectives, often interacting dynamically with users or systems.

AI literacy [2]

Skills, knowledge and understanding that allows providers, users and affected persons, taking into account their respective rights and obligations in the context of this Regulation, to make an informed deployment of AI systems and gain awareness.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) [1]

A system that is either software-based or embedded in hardware devices, and that displays intelligent behaviour by, inter alia, collecting, processing, analysing and interpreting its environment, and by taking action, with some degree of autonomy, to achieve specific goals.

AI-assisted

Human-led process where AI offers suggestions, but the human stays fully in control. Think: spellcheck or auto-summarise. E.g. Writing support tools, idea starters.

AI-augmented

Collaborative effort. AI adds meaningful input (e.g. drafts, visuals, ideas), but humans co-create and direct the outcome. E.g. Campaign drafts, image generation, A/B copy variations.

AI-generated

Content is primarily created by AI, based on prompts or inputs. Human checks quality, accuracy, and tone. E.g. Blog posts, reports, visuals created and refined by AI.

AI-autonomous

AI makes decisions or creates outputs with minimal or no human input. Can include execution, not just creation. Ex. Chatbots, dynamic pricing, real-time ad targeting.

Bias [3]

Any prejudiced personal or social perception of a person or group of persons based on their personal traits.

Communication [4]

Any form of message (images, text, sounds, ...) that serves to promote, directly or indirectly, the goods, services or image of a natural or legal person engaged in an economic activity.

Deepfake

Media that realistically imitates a person's voice, face or actions, potentially creating false or misleading impressions.

Discrimination [5]

Any differential treatment of a person or group of persons based on grounds that have no objective or reasonable justification and are therefore prohibited by Union law.

Drift (Model Drift)

A phenomenon where an AI model's performance degrades over time due to changes in data inputs, user behaviour or environmental factors. Requires monitoring and updates.

EU AI Act Risk Categories

Classification of AI systems under the EU AI Act as minimal, limited, high or unacceptable risk, based on their potential impact on rights, safety and trust.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)

EU regulation governing personal data use, emphasising lawful processing, consent, transparency, and rights of individuals, including in AI systems.

Generative AI

A subset of AI capable of creating new content – such as images, text, audio, or video – based on patterns learned from existing data.

IP (Intellectual Property)

Legal rights protecting creative works and brand assets, including copyrights, trademarks and personality rights (e.g. voice, image, name).

Privacy-enhancing technologies (PETs) [8]

A collection of digital technologies and approaches that permit collection, processing, analysis and sharing of information while protecting the confidentiality of personal data. In particular, PETs enable a relatively high level of utility from data, while minimising the need for data collection and processing.

Prompt

An input (instruction, question or description) provided to an AI system to generate a specific output or response. Prompt design affects accuracy, tone and bias.

Vulnerable persons or group of persons [6]

What constitutes a vulnerable person or group is often context-specific. Temporary life events (such as childhood or illness), market factors (such as information asymmetry or market power), economic factors (such as poverty), factors linked to one's identity (such as gender, religion or culture) or other factors can play a role. Under Article 21 on non-discrimination, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights encompasses the following grounds, which can be a reference point amongst others: namely sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age and sexual orientation.

[1] [2] [3] [5]

Definition as provided in the AI Act

[4]

Definition as provided in the Flemish Media Decree and the Media Decree of the French Community

[6]

Definition as provided in the Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI

[7]

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

[8]

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)



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