



Here's How Much Inaccurate Data Will Cost CTV Advertisers In 2026

Editorial Team

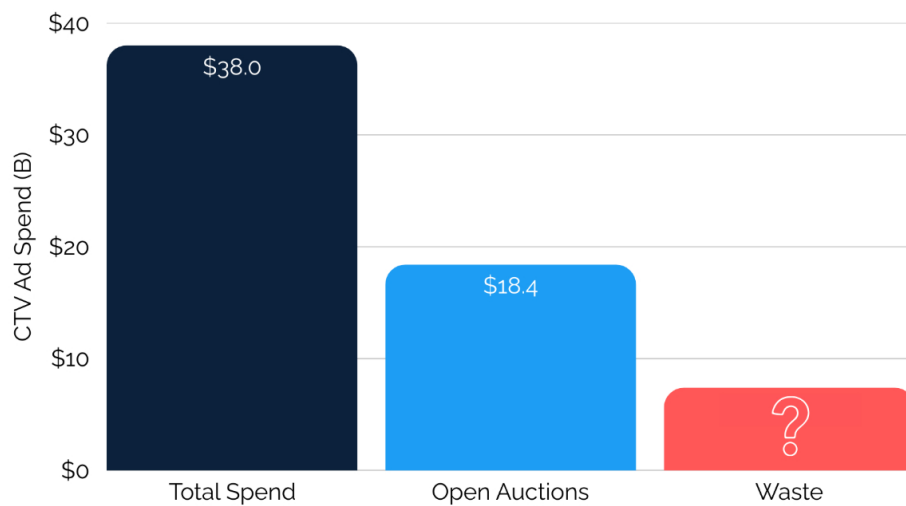
February 11, 2026

Analysis, Company News

U.S. connected TV ad spending is projected to reach \$38 billion in 2026, according to eMarketer. But an uncomfortable truth facing advertisers making those investments is that a massive slice of that spend will evaporate into thin air, thanks to one quiet but costly problem: inaccurate identity and audience data.

With 88% of CTV transactions now happening programmatically and roughly \$18.4 billion flowing through open auctions, the category increasingly depends on identity signals and demographic modeling to drive targeting, measurement, and optimization. Those signals, however, remain deeply unstable.

According to Truthset's just-released [2026 State of Data Accuracy report](#), flawed identity matching and unreliable audience segments are quietly draining billions from the open CTV marketplace, creating a systemic "accuracy tax" levied at every stage of the supply chain.

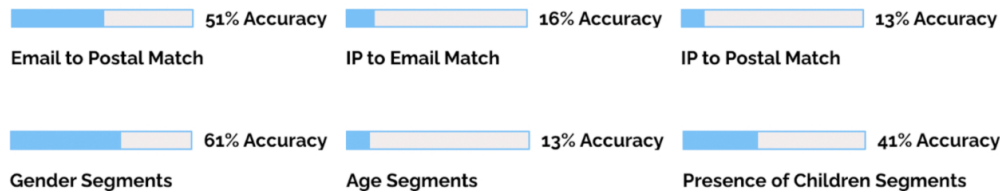


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Wasted CTV Spend Is a Systemic Issue

Truthset's multi-year research shows that the problem begins with faulty identity resolution, such as inaccurate IP-to-household connections, and compounds through misclassified demographic segments, broken attribution, and misdirected media.

The data paints a stark picture:



When the signals powering CTV buying are this unreliable, every decision that follows becomes guesswork. Brands unknowingly serve ads to the wrong households. Measurement tools record phantom outcomes. And media strategies chase the illusion of scale rather than real performance.

Based on years of cross-signal analysis, Truthset conservatively estimates that roughly 40% of every dollar spent in the open CTV programmatic market is wasted due to inaccurate data—translating to approximately \$7.4 billion in lost CTV value in 2026 alone.

But the dollar figures only tell part of the story.

The bigger waste is the missed connections: ads that never reached real shoppers, brand moments that fell flat on the biggest screen in the home, and marketing teams left without clarity on what actually worked.





The “Accuracy Tax” Draining CTV Budgets

As CTV becomes an increasingly performance-driven channel expected to connect ad exposure directly to outcomes like store visits, purchases, and household-level behavior—the cost of getting identity wrong only grows.

In an environment where billions are traded automatically through open auctions, inaccurate audience inputs don't just reduce efficiency. They reshape entire buying strategies, distort reporting, and quietly siphon ROI from marketing budgets.



Scott McKinley
Founder, CEO
truth{set}

"Whether they realize it or not, advertisers are paying an accuracy tax levied at every stage of the data pipeline, resulting in both wasted impressions and opportunities. If marketers can't rely on the data guiding their decisions, they're flying blind.

As inflation pressures continue and new tariff policies tighten marketing budgets across industries, media buyers are scrutinizing every advertising dollar. And marketers are moving spend toward deterministic channels where they can reach authenticated users.

For the programmatic open web to remain competitive with walled gardens, validated data is essential to ensure accurate signals that connect ads to real people and drive marketing profitability."

Accuracy Is the Only Advantage That Scales in CTV

Advertisers don't need more CTV data.

They need better CTV data—data they can trust.

Through our [Data Rated Audiences™](#) platform, Truthset brings transparency and validation to audience segments activated across the open web and CTV ecosystem. The platform allows buyers to activate only the highest-performing, multi-sourced segments contributed by members of The Data Collective, while helping data providers benchmark and improve the quality of their offerings.

Rather than forcing marketers to choose between reach and precision, Data Rated Audiences is designed to surface quality at scale.

Providers retain their full files. Buyers gain the ability to decide how much accuracy they require. And the market moves toward accountability instead of blind automation.

[Download the full report here.](#)



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