

# Making marketing wagers on online sports betting

Consumers' digital behaviors underscore brand opportunities amid CX risks



# A meteoric rise

Sports fan or not, you've likely noticed the rapid expansion of marketing for online sportsbooks (BetMGM, DraftKings, FanDuel, etc.). The ads are everywhere, often including big-name celebrities, whose mass appeal helps capture attention across various sports leagues.

U.S. ad spending for sportsbooks is projected to reach ~\$2 billion in 2023, up 8% YoY, and a whopping 400% from 2018<sup>1</sup>. As legalization expands across states, digital applications improve, media coverage expands, and marketing efforts grow, it's expected that 32 million American adults will place a bet online in 2025, up 39% from 2022<sup>2</sup>. Globally, the sports betting market is expected to reach ~\$100 billion by the end of the year<sup>3</sup>, with some projecting ~14% CAGR until 2027<sup>4</sup>.

**\$2b**  
projected  
US ad  
spending  
in 2023

**32m**  
US adults  
will place a  
bet online  
in 2025

In an increasingly competitive environment, customer acquisition is at a premium, driving sportsbooks to advertise aggressively across mediums. They're looking to win the business of existing bettors and attract new customers to place their first bets. But how are consumers reacting to this influx of sports betting ads? Using DISQO's single-source access to sentiment and behavioral data, we examined how consumer attitudes and behaviors are evolving.

## GROWTH

How have digital search and sportsbook site visits evolved over the past year?

## SEGMENTATION

Among those engaging in search and site visits, which groups are best and worst represented?

## RECEPTIVITY

Are consumers open to continued or more advertising in this space?

## PROMOTION

What advertising messages and features would be compelling to betting holdouts?

## BRAND SAFETY

Are media firms, brands, and celebrities partnering with betting firms taking calculated risks?

<sup>1</sup> Statista, <sup>2</sup> American Gambling Association,

<sup>3</sup> Researchandmarkets.com, <sup>4</sup> Forbes



# Methodology

With an audience of 2M+ opted in consumers, DISQO offers unique, single-source data about customer experience (CX), spanning sentiment and online behaviors. We leveraged our platform to triangulate a complete view of CX for sports betting advertising. Data informing the insights in this report were weighted to a representative audience of US adults on age, gender, and income.

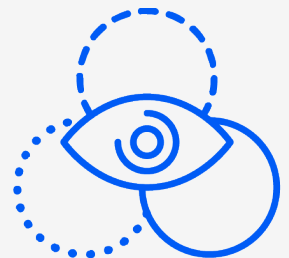
## BEHAVIOR

Consumers' digital behaviors were measured and analyzed via our desktop and mobile metering capabilities. This empowered a detailed picture of web traffic to specific sports betting apps and sites (e.g., DraftKings, FanDuel), as well as searches for these brands. We looked at how such digital behaviors have changed in the past year, and also assessed the proportion of behavior that originated from select demographic subgroups (age, income, gender). Data is specific to site visits and searches from May 2022 to May 2023.



## PERCEPTION

We surveyed 24,787 consumers in DISQO's audience from May 27 to 29, 2023. Questions focused on interest in sports betting (e.g., receptivity, emotional reactions), unmet needs (e.g., desired marketing for non-bettors), and advertising perceptions (e.g., partnerships with sports leagues and celebrities, morality perspectives).



# Growth is clear, and strongly associated with the NFL season

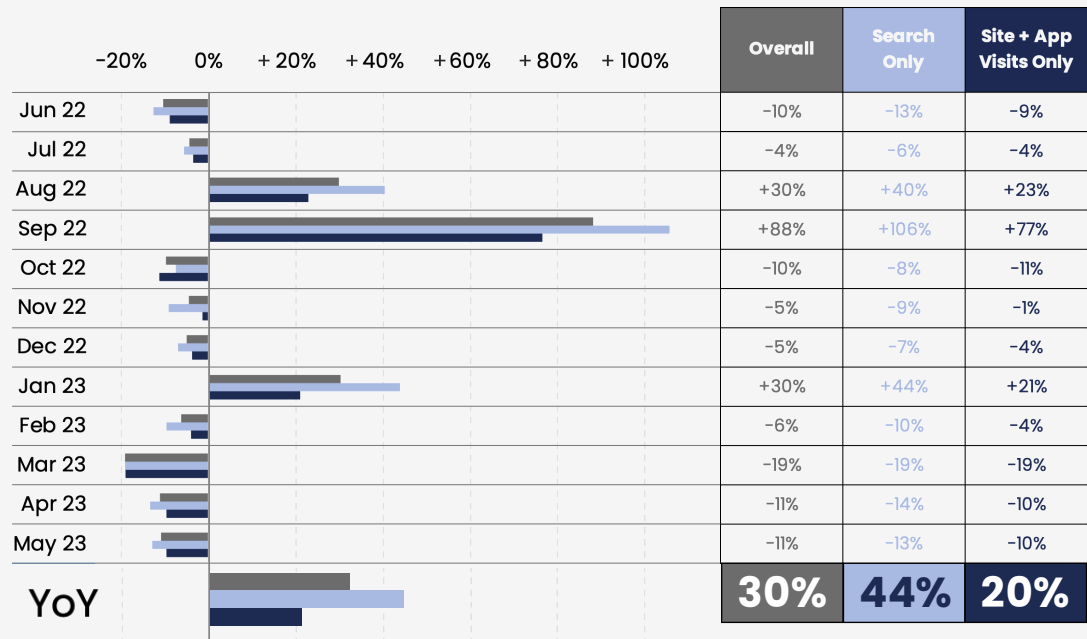
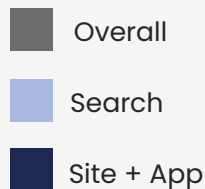
As seen in our 2023 Big Game report<sup>1</sup>, advertising around sports betting is uniquely impactful when paired with the largest annual sporting events. Below, we look at how search (i.e., searches in various browser formats) and site visitation (i.e., direct visits to company websites) for sports betting trended in the US over the past year. We found a clear peak around key dates in the 2022–23 NFL season.

## Monthly change in digital behavior

DISQO

Outcomes

Lift data



Monthly change in web searches (light blue), website/app visits (dark blue), or both (gray) to DraftKings and FanDuel  
Source: DISQO Outcomes Lift dataset, May 2022 to May 2023, all results are weighted on age, gender, and income

## FOOTBALL FEVER

We see that continued investments in the NFL and its broadcasting partners is fueling tremendous growth. Digital behaviors for Draftkings and FanDuel – two of the largest US sportsbooks – peaked at the start of the NFL season (August / September) and during the NFL playoffs (January / February).

Overall, engagement rose 30% YoY, with a 44% increase in search and a 20% increase in site visitation. These results are partially driven by ad spend: ~80% of sportsbooks' national TV spend was allocated to the NFL in 2021, and these ads accounted for almost 5% of all TV ad impressions in the early weeks of the 2022 NFL season<sup>2</sup>.

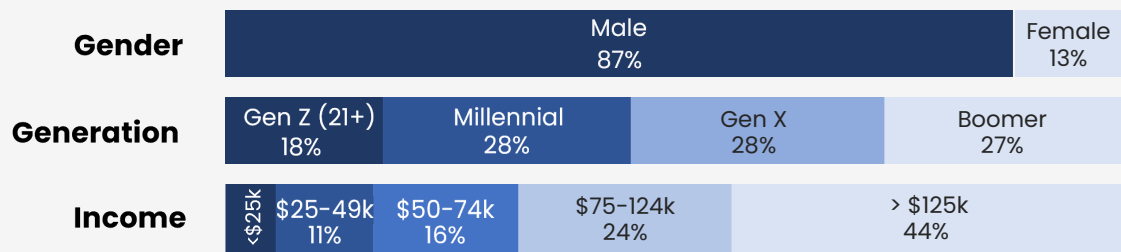
<sup>1</sup> DISQO Big Game Report: <https://go.disqo.com/the-big-game-report-bl-owned-website>, <sup>2</sup> iSpot TV data reported by Forbes

# Stimulating growth across segments

While league-driven growth is a clear success story for sportsbooks, segment-driven growth across more diverse audiences can help unlock even greater potential. Conventional segmentation often focuses on men in younger cohorts, but reaching beyond this core audience is key to sustainable long-term momentum. Below, DISQO's behavioral data highlights a few additional segments that provide near-term opportunities.

## Proportion of search, app, and website visits towards DraftKings and FanDuel

DISQO Outcomes Lift data (May 2022–May 2023)



### FEMALE FOCUS

In the past year, women fueled over 10% of the digital behaviors associated with sports betting. There are many reasons why women's representation in this space should steadily climb. When you consider their interest in sports and fantasy sports, and the increasing popularity of women's sports leagues, growth is unlikely to relent. Greater investments in female-focused (and gender-neutral) advertising can pay off in the long run.

**13%** of sports betting behaviors were driven by women

### BET ON BOOMERS

Baby Boomers (aged 59–77) drive over 25% of sportsbook search and digital activity. While they may not be as technologically savvy as their younger counterparts, improved digital experiences combined with increased mobile adoption should attract more Boomers to online sports betting. These adults not only represent a huge proportion of the US population, but also drive massive attention to headline sporting events.

# Receptivity to sports betting is polarized

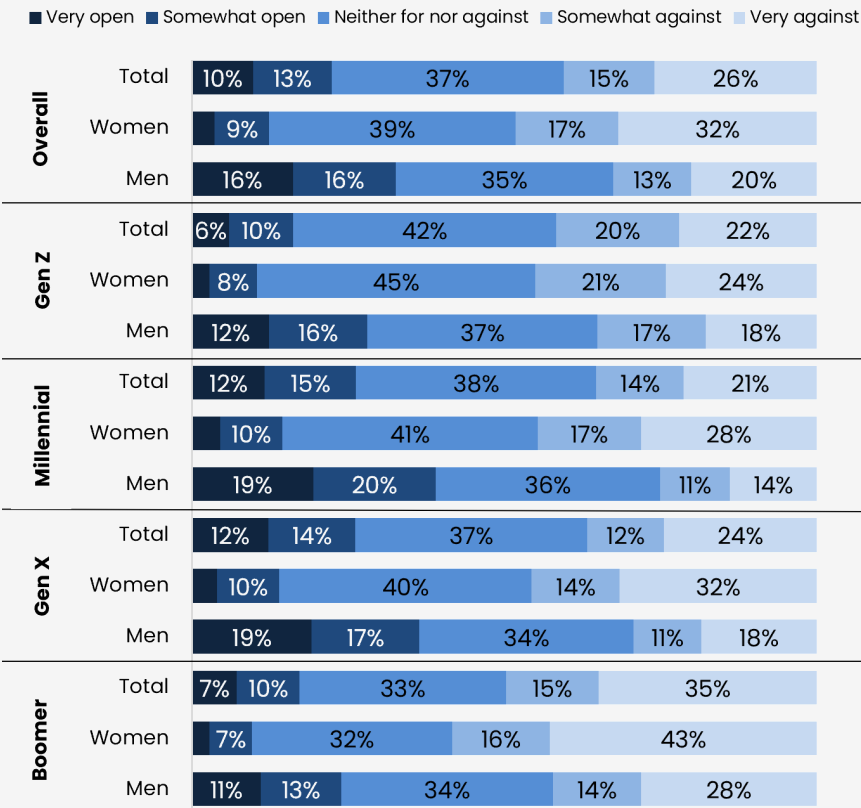
DISQO's behavioral analysis clearly shows that sports betting ads are driving consumers to digital action. However, pairing these behavioral insights with attitudinal data reveals a more nuanced picture of the sports betting landscape. With high-fidelity survey results, we can look beyond near-term growth and towards long-term appeal.

To start, let's look at openness to online sports betting in general. As the opportunity to bet on one's favorite sports becomes increasingly commonplace, what proportion of consumers are willing to try it out?

## EARLY LEAD

For younger men (particularly Millennials), sports betting is fairly normalized, showcasing the natural synergy between ever-better sportsbooks and their league / media partners. Almost 40% of Millennial men are open to sports betting, compared to just 14% of Millennial women. Smaller gaps—15 to 20 points—are observed between men and women in other generations.

## Openness to online sports betting



## EVENING THE ODDS

Regardless of generation, sports betting is a more difficult sell for women. Just 12% are open to it, not exceeding 15% across any age group. There is some room for optimism, as a large proportion of women (~40%) are “neither for nor against” sports betting. This lack of negativity among such a large subset of women suggests ample conversion opportunities as product and marketing efforts evolve.

# Sentiment about sports betting ads leans negative

We also explored consumers' feelings toward betting-focused advertising. Specifically, we asked people what feelings come to mind when they think about advertising for sports betting, and let them choose as many terms as they deemed fit.

		Annoyance	Concern	Excitement	Motivation	Anger	Confusion	Happiness	Positive (any)	Negative (any)	Neutral
Overall	Total	18%	16%	7%	5%	4%	4%	4%	15%	42%	43%
	Women	18%	18%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	11%	44%	45%
	Men	17%	14%	10%	6%	5%	4%	5%	20%	39%	40%
Gen Z	Total	16%	17%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%	18%	45%	37%
	Women	17%	17%	4%	6%	4%	8%	4%	14%	46%	39%
	Men	13%	17%	10%	8%	6%	7%	6%	25%	43%	33%
Millennial	Total	15%	13%	9%	5%	5%	4%	5%	19%	38%	43%
	Women	17%	15%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	13%	40%	47%
	Men	13%	12%	13%	7%	5%	4%	6%	27%	35%	38%
Gen X	Total	17%	14%	8%	4%	4%	3%	3%	15%	38%	47%
	Women	17%	17%	5%	3%	4%	3%	2%	9%	41%	50%
	Men	17%	12%	10%	6%	4%	3%	4%	20%	36%	44%
Boomer	Total	24%	20%	4%	2%	4%	2%	2%	8%	50%	42%
	Women	22%	23%	3%	1%	5%	2%	1%	5%	52%	43%
	Men	25%	17%	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%	10%	49%	42%

When you think about "advertisements for sports betting and gambling," which feeling comes to you?

## WIDE SPREAD ON SENTIMENT

Typical feelings are quite negative overall, but much more positive among younger men. For the average adult, feelings like annoyance and concern are most common, followed by excitement and motivation. There's also a large swath of neutral feelings (~45%), indicating apathy toward increased marketing in this space.

For optimists, this neutrality means consumers are OK with the current state, and may not mind seeing more marketing. For pessimists, this apathy suggest limited growth potential for non-engaged segments.

**~3:1**  
of negative  
to positive  
sentiment  
about sports  
betting ads

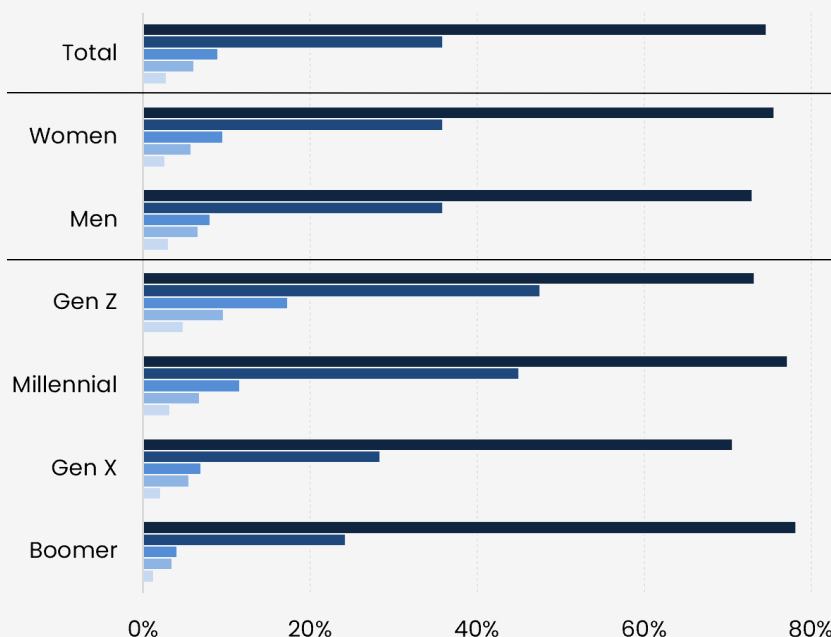
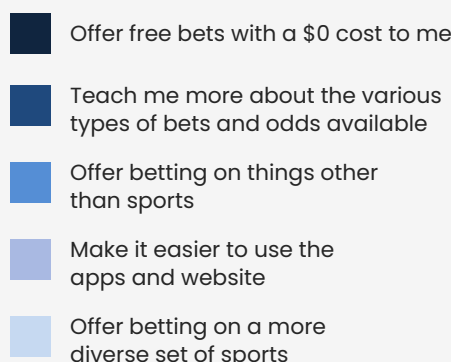


# Pair education with excitement

As sportsbook advertising has continued its rapid ascent, the overarching strategy for marquee spots has often focused on celebrity endorsements, action-oriented scenes, and big wins. However, these tried-and-true approaches may overlook more nuanced marketing methods for new customer acquisition. To explore what might be missing, we asked non-bettors which type(s) of outreach they want to see more of before trying it out.

## Desired outreach from sportsbook companies

Among consumers who haven't tried online sports betting



What are some ways, if any, that companies could interest you in trying online sports betting?

## PARLAY TRIALS AND EDUCATION

While “bonus” or “risk-free” bets remain the most appealing route for fence-sitters, educational marketing shows surprising potential. For instance, ~35% of all adults say that they want these companies to teach them more (e.g., understanding odds, parlays, spreads, etc.), while about twice that many want free trials. Therefore sportsbooks could have success pairing these two approaches, such as giving a free set of trials that walks through the ins and outs.

## BROADEN THE BOOK

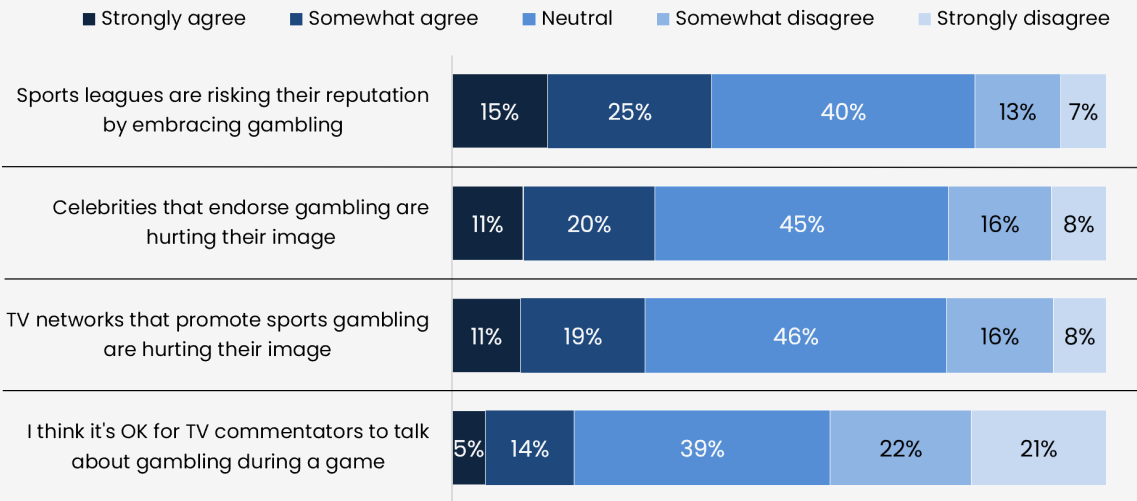
Beyond education, a notable proportion of non-bettors (especially GenZers) are asking for increased coverage of areas other than sports. Because gambling interest and sports interest are not mutually exclusive, competitive events outside the conventional “sports” definition (e.g., e-sports, dog shows, reality competitions, etc.) can drive incremental appeal toward betting activity. Oddsmaking and sportsbook expertise aside, new formats attract incremental audiences.



# There's two sides to the sponsorship coin

We've seen that reactions to sports betting ads can be divisive. Sportsbooks face unique challenges from a perceived morality perspective. It follows that advertisers, brand partners, and media companies face a double-edged sword with sportsbook marketing. Do they aggressively ride the continued wave of popularity, or do they hedge their positions based on [potential] regulatory and societal backlash? To shed some light, we asked consumers how they feel about leagues, celebrities, networks, and even commentators promoting sports betting.

## Attitudes toward sports betting sponsorships



### NEUTRAL FIRST, REACTIVE SECOND

While we see large volumes of neutrality (40-45% of consumers, similar to emotional reactions on page 7) we also see strong reactivity among those with a clear opinion. About 40% think sports leagues are risking their reputations by embracing sports betting, and another 30% think the same about celebrities and TV networks.

### KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON THE ODDS

While this sentiment may not be driving viewers away from leagues and networks, our data outlines the difficult middle ground sportsbook partners occupy. This tightrope remains treacherous, particularly as leagues like the NFL reckon with expanded sports betting within their own player base.

**43%** don't think it's OK for TV commentators to discuss sports betting

# Key implications



## PUT SOME CHIPS ON THE TABLE

As sportsbooks continue to evolve their marketing strategies, brands with incidental affiliation (e.g., sports equipment, apparel, teams, etc.) should certainly have a few bets placed on future growth. Whether this means exploring marketing on new media channels (e.g., FanDuel TV, sportsbook apps, etc.), partnering on responsible gaming efforts, or allowing sportsbook advertising on a given medium, there's clearly a huge amount of value to be gained by riding the wave.

That said, the future of legalized sports betting is rife with uncertainty. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have discussed the possibility of increased regulations, and the jury is out on where this will lead. While growth continues to be the most likely near-term outcome, fallout from the rapid ascension of these platforms is inherently difficult to predict 3-5 years down the road. Taking a "hedged" approach should give brands the opportunity to showcase their relevance with sports-betting aficionados without going so far as offending sports-betting detractors.



## GIVE OTHERS REASONS TO JOIN THE ACTION

As we've seen, there are clear gaps in engagement, openness, and positivity toward sports betting. In some ways, this conclusion is fairly straightforward—some people don't like it and never will. And while that's clearly true for a subset of non-bettors, many groups simply haven't been invited to join in a way that makes them feel comfortable. If sportsbook advertising caters too heavily toward specific segments (young men, football fans, etc.), a lack of interest from other groups may simply reflect a lack of perceived inclusion.

Whether you consider the surging popularity of women's sports, the increasing tech-savviness of "older" adults, or other near-term societal trends, there's ample opportunity for sports betting companies to cast a wider net. If a marketer is going to get in the game, we encourage them to test new ad strategies toward under-represented groups, and to evaluate lift strategically when justifying investment.



# Key implications



## RESPONSIBLE GAMING IS TABLE-STAKES

Beyond its necessity from a regulatory perspective, it's important to reiterate that non-bettors have big concerns about gambling's financial and societal implications. Companies who choose to lead the conversation—via innovative marketing, novel sponsorships, and/or educational media—may have a leg up on competitors.

To justify and evaluate a more “advanced” position on responsible gaming communications, we encourage sportsbooks, brand partners, and media platforms to test diverse messaging tactics constantly. Whether it's a tweak in terminology, a new tone toward specific gaming topics, or entirely revamped creative, DISQO is uniquely positioned to help companies test, evaluate, and repeat. Getting one's marketing right in such a dynamic space requires speed, flexibility, and scale, so firms should implement agile testing approaches to ensure communications can evolve rapidly.



## SUBTLETY CAN OUTSHINE SHOWMANSHIP

As marketing in this industry has expanded, there's a clear bias toward advertising focused on big names, big games, and big wins. But anyone who has actually gambled knows that the sports betting experience can be a mixed bag. Sure, there's the unmistakable adrenaline-pumping high of winning, but there's also the sheer excitement that comes from having some skin in the game. Beyond winning a few bucks, marketers should consider messaging and social connectivity features that focus on outcompeting friends, family, or co-workers. Tap into sport's ability to bring us all together, win or lose.

To capture attention from less-established customer segments, it could be advantageous to zig while others zag. Instead of huge celebrities, what about everyday bettors? Instead of action-packed movie scenes, what about a fun afternoon wagering with friends? We encourage industry insiders to test out more subtle approaches, and to offer a broader thematic mix to capture greater attention in a heavily saturated marketplace.



# Improve your odds with DISQO's ad measurement tools



## BRAND AND OUTCOMES LIFT

Advertisers, agencies, and media platforms can measure brand perception and behavioral impacts resulting from cross-channel ad exposure. With client-supplied campaign flight information, we tag cross-channel exposure locations and match these locations against metered digital behaviors to generate exposed and look-alike control groups. Attitudinal (Brand Lift) and behavioral (Outcomes Lift) differences between groups are then used to calculate advertising lift, enabling powerful conclusions about marketing performance by channel, audience, and against competitors.

**Whether it's a traditional sportsbook ad, spots about a new brand partnership, or an educational message focused on acquisition, DISQO can help measure both attitudinal and behavioral impacts of ad exposure.**



## AD TESTING

Brands and their creative teams can nimbly test creative assets and messaging prior to going in-market. Evaluate which sportsbook content is best, which celebrities resonate with diverse audiences, and whether partnerships with sportsbooks can lead to incremental improvements in brand positioning. Tests can be built across campaigns, creative types, channels, and target audiences to confidently evaluate all necessary assets. The industry-leading speed and cost-effectiveness of DISQO Ad Testing allows brands and agencies to replace guesswork with data by testing every creative.



## BEHAVIORAL TARGETING

Using the industry's largest fully-consented panel audience, we can help you execute cutting-edge targeting on your audiences of choice. Because many of our panelists openly share their behavioral experiences with us through digital metering, we're able to offer surveys that target specific audiences like those who visit sportsbooks or search for sports betting platforms.



# Win big with DISQO's Ad Testing, plus Brand & Outcomes Lift!

## LET'S TALK



hello@disqo.com



LinkedIn.com/company/disqo/



Instagram.com/godisqo/

