



Meta's Restricted Categories

The impact on charities (and what to do about it)

14 January 2025



About Open

Open is the UK's leading strategic and creative charity specialist. Our mission is to **Bring people together to change the world** and our core expertise is communications and technology that inspire people to do the **Right Thing Right Now**.

We work exclusively with charities and NGOs to realise that goal. In the sixteen years it has been operating, Open has pushed the boundaries of fundraising and worked with a wide range of household names in the UK and internationally.

We're called Open for a reason; we collaborate and we're receptive to new ideas and approaches. It also means we share knowledge with the sector - we do that via webinars, including our Charity Benchmarks project, or other instances like this guide.

What we do

- Audience research and insight
- Strategic consultancy and campaign planning
- Creative ideation, development and implementation
- Campaign management and optimisation
- Donation payment and processing systems

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About this guide

The content of this guide is intended for fundraisers who use Meta ads to reach their supporters.

It describes a currently evolving situation – the full impact of which remains to be seen. In some places it is speculative and some facts might date quickly.

With all of that in mind, we hope you find it useful.

For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact: henry.astley@opencreates.com

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What's going on?

First up - a summary of the new Meta update. What it does, how it works and why it has come about.

Meta is restricting certain categories of websites

In late 2024, Meta announced a new change to its advertising tools, effective from January 2025, which impacts a number of different organisations across sectors – though it appears those in the “health and wellness” space have been hardest hit.

The change has been made to protect its users' privacy regarding sensitive personal data. Once live, **the websites and apps advertisers use as campaign destinations could no longer host certain conversion “events” via the Meta Pixel or Conversions API.**

The intention is to protect the privacy of individuals performing certain actions. For example, someone purchasing pharmaceutical products on a website, signing up to a political cause, or – in the case of medical charities – requesting a cancer support service.

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About data source categories in Meta Events Manager

At Meta, we have restrictions around the kinds of information businesses can share with us through our Meta Business Tools. We don't want or permit advertisers to use the Meta Business Tools to share information about people that is not allowed under our Meta Business Tool Terms. This includes information that may be considered sensitive (including any information defined as sensitive under applicable laws, regulations and applicable industry guidelines), or information that is otherwise not allowed under our terms.

Data source categories

We also work to categorize data sources, such as websites and apps, that send us data through the Meta Business Tools based on the topics related to the data source and the products and/or services provided. This helps us determine how your data source may be categorized, including if your data source may fall under a category that comes with restrictions. It is important to review the categories assigned to your data sources in Meta Events Manager to confirm they are appropriately categorized.

Data source categories that may have certain data sharing restrictions include, but are not limited to:

- **Health and wellness:** Is associated with medical conditions, specific health statuses, or provider/patient relationships (for example, a patient portal or wellness tracker for depression)
- **Financial service:** Provides financial tools, consultation and/or services, consumer credit reports
- **Unsuitable content:** Contains topics related to unsuitable content, including content that violates our Community and Advertising Standards (examples include hate speech, violence and illegal activities)
- **Politics:** Is associated with members of a specific political party, political position or contains topics related to a political issue
- **Race:** Is associated with individuals of a specific race
- **Religion:** Is associated with individuals with specific religious or spiritual beliefs and practices

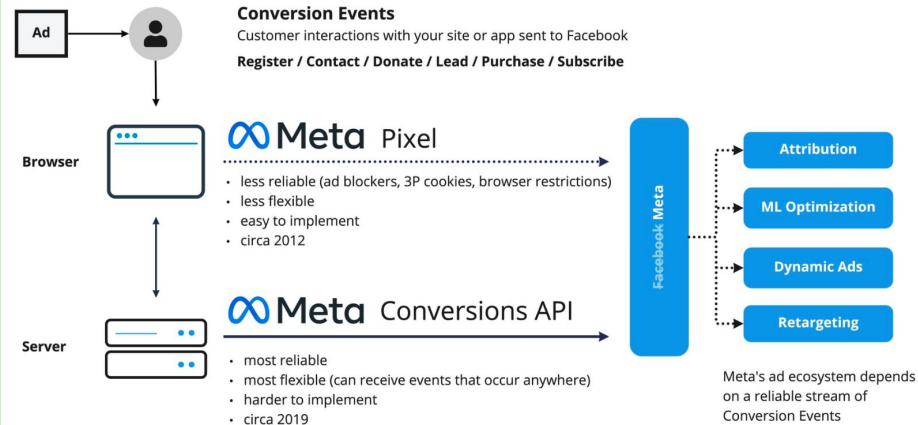
Source - Meta

What's the impact?

The consequence of this update is that advertisers will no longer be able to optimise Meta advertising campaigns toward these restricted conversion actions if their website or app has been placed in a “restricted” category. In the most severe case (a blanket ban on all “lower funnel” actions for the category), any purchase, donation or event sign-up would be effectively removed as an optimisation goal for these campaigns – and as a data source for building custom audiences from.

These conversion events are hugely important to the effectiveness of Meta campaigns. Without them, Meta's AI loses its ability to target well.

Meta would still allow advertisers to run upper funnel campaigns (such as brand awareness) and direct response campaigns that remain within Facebook or Instagram (such as its native lead gen forms). But direct response campaigns that use lower funnel goals on websites including cause-led fundraising, legacies and challenge events could all be significantly impacted. **Charities who would normally expect relatively low CPAs from Meta will see a decline in performance if this data is restricted.**



Meta's conversion optimisation tools – taken from [SITEJET integrations forum](#)

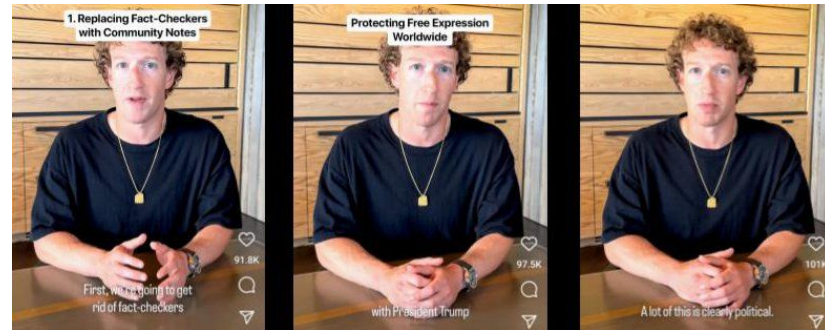
Why is this happening?

This is not the first time Meta has needed to introduce a big change to their advertising tools at short notice. Advertisers were required to change a lot in response to Apple's iOS 14.5 update a few years ago. **And just like then, it appears that external (this time legislative) factors are causing them to pivot.**

While Meta has recognised “political” organisations for some time (requiring them to verify themselves), this is the first big change to data policy at the advertiser category level.

It's another example of an increasingly fragmented method of information sharing and privacy governance from Meta, which includes a paid ‘advertising free’ subscription (only in the EU, to appease the European Commission) and more recently a move toward no fact checking at all (just in the USA, to appease Donald Trump).

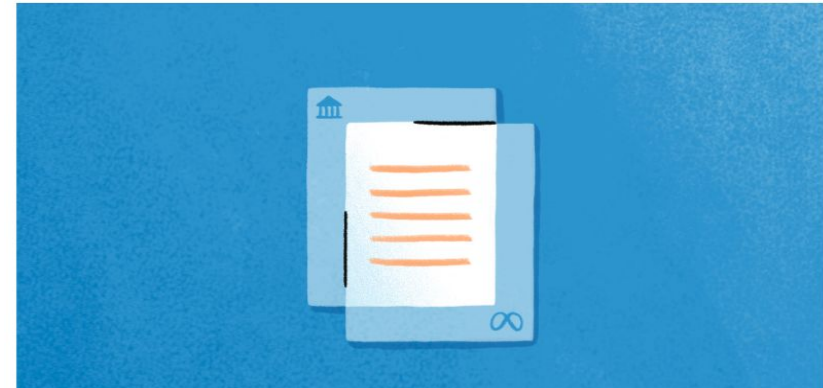
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Meta

Facebook and Instagram to Offer Subscription for No Ads in Europe

November 12, 2024



How does it work?

Meta hasn't been very thorough in its reasons for restricting one website or app over another. For healthcare causes, certain domains the Meta pixel is placed on are flagged as "restricted" with this accompanying message (fig. right).

There hasn't been a list provided of which "specific medical conditions" are flagged and to what extent the depth and focus of how these issues are discussed within the web property plays a role. It hasn't been made clear to what extent subdomains/portal logins hosted within a page or app affect the top-level domain (or vice versa). Meta hasn't publicly confirmed whether page text, domain name, page metadata or imagery are all considered.

What does seem to be consistent is that many medical charities appear to have been placed within the new "health and wellness" category – with varying degrees of data restriction across their fundraising portfolios.

About the category ×

The data source is associated with one or more medical conditions or health statuses.

What does the category include?

Products, services, treatments or information for specific medical conditions or substance use disorders, suicide or self-injury such as:

- Cancer
- Anxiety
- Arthritis
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Addiction
- Self cutting
- Burning

Examples

A data source can be in this category when it markets vitamins to treat arthritis, provides articles on breast cancer, focuses on resources for alcoholics and more.

So what options do charities have?

Next we've identified the possible actions your organisation could take, considering the pros and cons of each.





Do nothing

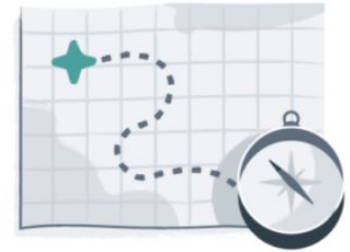
Charities that have been quick to apply for an extension have until the beginning of February (approx.) before the changes go live.

The “worst case scenario” would mean Meta campaigns which have been set up using lower funnel objectives would remain running – **only optimised toward landing page views going forward.**

It remains to be seen how these campaigns will continue to perform but the expectation based on previous testing of these objectives is there would be a **significant impact on the performance over time** – as Meta is no longer able to distinguish between people who are likely to perform a certain action and adjust delivery appropriately.

Choose a campaign objective

- ☐  Awareness
- ☐  Traffic
- ☐  Engagement
- ☐  Leads



Meta’s “upper funnel” ad objectives do not use website conversions to inform targeting.

Appeal the categorisation

It's possible that Meta has not specifically intended for charities to be affected in this way and has commercial brands in mind with the new rules.

Meta has provided advertisers with a button to “appeal” the categorisation but it remains to be seen whether they are prepared to lift the penalty from any charities – especially those that do collect sensitive data.

After all, charities who do offer healthcare services on their websites are arguably collecting highly sensitive event data.

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Details

Your dataset [REDACTED] has been categorized as Health & wellness condition. As such, the following data sharing restriction(s) will start in 34 days:

- In the European Region, data sharing may be blocked.
- In other locations, certain standard events may be blocked and your website or app may be in a core setup.

If you think the category hasn't been applied appropriately, you can request a review now before any restrictions start.

[Request review](#)

Filter by			
Source	Category	Status	
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	⚠ Review rejected	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	⚠ Review rejected	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	⚠ Review rejected	View details
Website	Health & wellness condition	-	View details

Change what you are doing in Meta

There is some debate about whether there are workarounds available within the Meta platform – but it's quite possible that these could constitute bad usage of Meta's tools.

You would still be able to measure link click-throughs in Meta Ads and conversion rates via Google Analytics. With that sort of data, you'll still be able to run and compare the performance of Meta Ads, but direct response performance would suffer with poorer optimisation.

Lead gen campaigns within Facebook would still be possible – meaning Givepanel challenge events campaigns are not affected by this. Similarly, petition/handraiser campaigns that use Facebook's lead gen forms will still work. **We could start to see two-stage lead generation campaigns deliver better relative fundraising performance as a result.**

Brand campaigns wouldn't be impacted significantly as they don't rely on website event data to optimise delivery.

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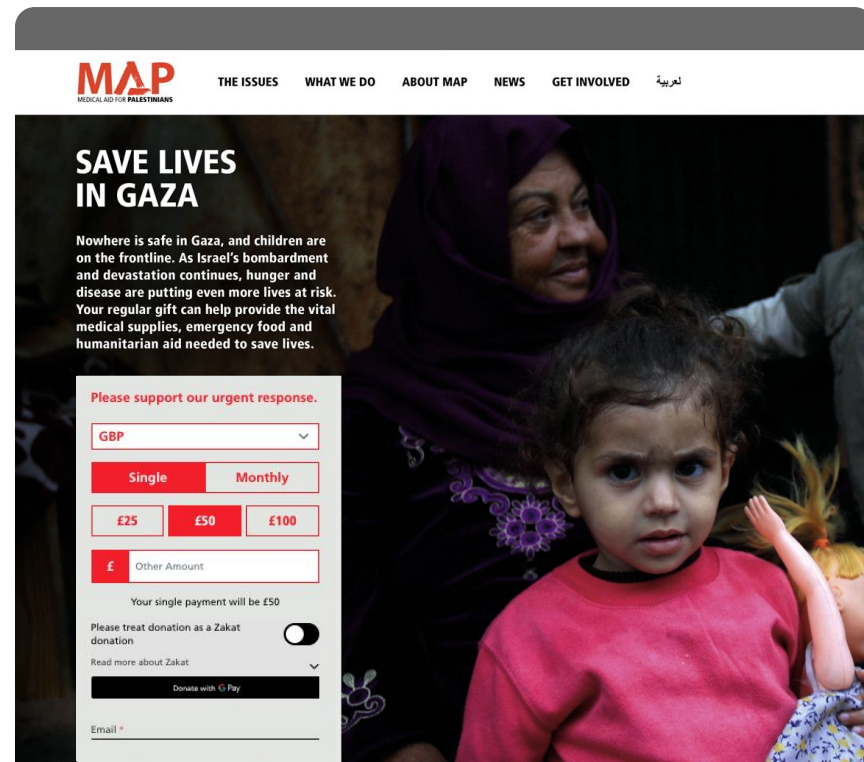
Givepanel's model of events fundraising wouldn't be affected as it uses Facebook lead forms and groups rather than website destinations.

Use custom campaign web domains for Meta acquisition

The restriction is at the web domain/app level so it's possible that the issue can be solved if new campaigns are hosted on alternate domains. However, the rules around what will and won't be categorised haven't been made clear.

Without more detail from Meta there's more to be confirmed. But at Open **we're developing new campaign-specific journeys and webflows designed to sit securely away from sensitive areas of websites** and in accordance with Meta's new guidelines via our sister company Right Thing, Right Now.

You can see an example of a bespoke campaign checkout we built for Medical Aid for Palestinians on the right.



Move spend to other digital channels

This change is specific to Meta – alternative digital channels would still be available for direct response campaigns as before and recently we've been seeing relative channel performance starting to 'level out'.

With the right creative approach, we've seen YouTube/Performance Max and TikTok achieve results competitive to Meta and are using LinkedIn and Pinterest for more niche campaign types. **This is a reminder that diversification within digital has never been more important.**

Some ads we made that worked well are featured on the right - Concern's "Don't Wait" YouTube film (above) and NSPCC's Letter from Santa TikTok UGC (below).

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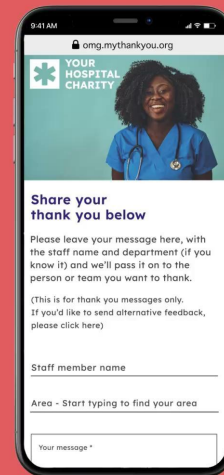
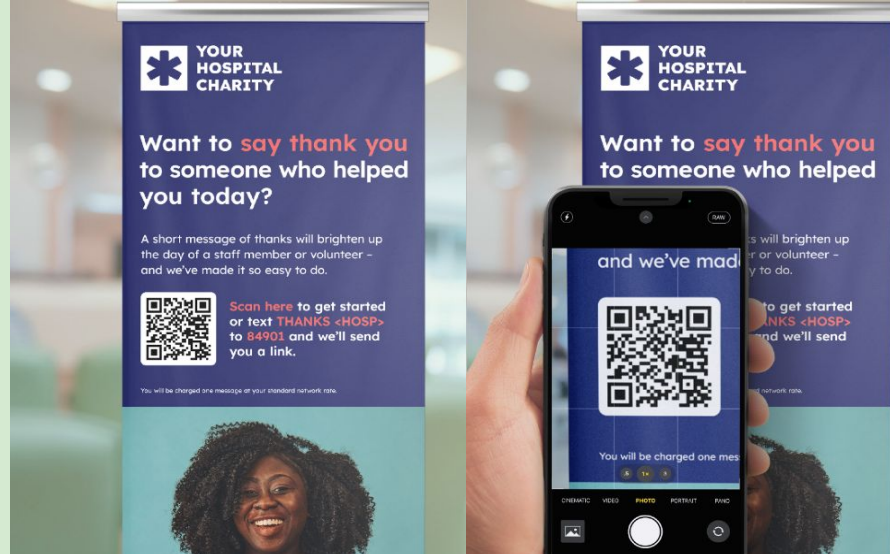
Move spend to other areas of acquisition

To plug the gap in new supporter acquisition, other channels such as TV/dialogue/print may see increased investment. **At Open we understand how fragile the social media ecosystem is, so we're interested in new forms of donor journeys that cross the bridge between IRL and online environments.**

Our new model for dialogue uses smart interactions between face-to-face fundraisers and supporters using online response mechanics – broadening what sorts of asks and propositions are possible within the space beyond regular giving.

Through *My Thank You* we are helping organisations leverage their private sites and harness the power of gratitude, converting it into financial support (featured on the right).

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Thanks for reading.

We hope you've found this guide interesting and useful. It describes something evolving quite quickly - so could go out of date fast. If you have anything to add we want to hear from you.

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