

# MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

2025-2026 Upfronts: Sports and Streaming Shine Amid Economic Caution

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*Also in this issue:*

Amazon Pulls Out of Google Shopping



## /BRIEFING ROOM

# 2025-2026 Upfronts: Sports and Streaming Shine Amid Economic Caution

By **Rachel Baker**, SVP, Head of Video Investment and Partnerships

Although the 2025–2026 upfront negotiations are not yet fully complete, by early August most major network groups—including NBCUniversal, Disney, Fox and Paramount—had announced the close of their deals. While broader macroeconomic uncertainty contributed to a slower overall upfront season, live programming—particularly sports—stood out as a clear area of strength.

## NBCUniversal

NBCUniversal was the first to close, reporting its highest ad sales volume in company history, largely driven by live events. The company will feature three major event tentpoles this broadcast year: the Milan-Cortina Olympics, Super Bowl LX, and the FIFA World Cup. NBCU says these events collectively broke previous sales records. Additionally, the NBA returns to NBCU this season, which it credits for a 45% year-over-year increase in live sports ad volume and a 20% uptick in new sports advertisers across its portfolio. Nearly one-third of NBCU’s upfront commitments went to Peacock.

## Disney

Shortly after NBCU, Disney announced it had finalized its upfront with strong gains in sports and streaming. Sports commitments totaled nearly \$4 billion, with growth across Monday Night Football, College Football, the WNBA, and NCAA women’s basketball. With Disney acquiring rights to “Inside the NBA” and the NBA Finals, the company saw single-digit growth in those areas. Streaming inventory made up around 40% of Disney’s upfront volume, fueled by ESPN and its direct-to-consumer offerings.

## Fox

Fox also closed its upfront with solid performance in both sports and news. Sports advertising saw double-digit growth, with commitments exceeding \$2 billion (excluding the 2026 World Cup). Fox News also delivered double-digit ad volume growth, supported by record audiences. Meanwhile, Tubi posted over 35% year-over-year ad growth.

## Paramount

Paramount stated its upfront negotiations are “virtually finished,” with results largely in line with last year—suggesting flat or slightly declining volume overall. However, its sports programming experienced double-digit gains in both volume and pricing, and streaming accounted for 30% of upfront ad sales.

## Amazon, Netflix, and More

While traditionally not major players in the upfront marketplace, both Amazon and Netflix have significantly expanded their presence, driven by growing investments in live sports and premium content. Amazon’s Prime Video, anchored by NFL Thursday Night Football, was nearly sold out during this year’s upfront cycle. The addition of NBA/WNBA rights, alongside a slate of premium programming and advanced ad solutions, helped Amazon secure over \$1.8 billion in advertising commitments. Netflix, meanwhile, reported a more than 2x increase in upfront ad sales, fueled by its vast library of premium content, growing lineup of live events—including NFL games—and a strong focus on sponsorship opportunities and ad innovation.

Smaller cable networks, such as A&E Networks and AMC Networks, are facing greater uncertainty than their larger counterparts. Without the draw of live sports or major tentpole programming, these networks are encountering softer demand and increased pricing pressure during negotiations.

## Implications for Advertisers

Despite the headline successes, the industry remains cautious. Analysts still expect declines in traditional TV ad spending and only modest or flat growth in streaming, barring resolution of broader trade risks. Many brands, especially in retail, automotive, CPG, and consumer electronics, are reducing media commitments and seeking more flexible, performance-based deals.

While streaming continues to be a strong category in all major network groups, its share of total upfront commitments remains roughly unchanged from recent years. This suggests that while advertisers still intend to invest in streaming, they’re showing more restraint during the upfront, opting instead for flexibility—unlike the firm commitments often required for live sports and prime time inventory.



## Navigating Audience Measurement

Another factor that slowed this year’s upfront negotiations was the industry-wide shift to Nielsen’s Big Data + Panel methodology. Both advertisers and networks had to navigate fluctuating audience metrics, making it more difficult to reach consensus on pricing. For an industry long dependent on traditional panel-only data, adapting to the new measurement posed a challenge, especially when trying to standardize deals. Many noted frustrations with inconsistent and erratic fluctuations in the data, which disproportionately affected smaller networks and those serving multicultural audiences. In contrast, larger network groups saw their variations somewhat even out.

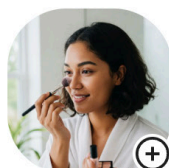
At Rain the Growth Agency, we understand the value of a total market approach—leveraging both the upfront, scatter, and direct response marketplaces to align with each client’s unique goals. While premium live events still benefit from upfront commitments, most inventory, especially in streaming, is increasingly available outside the traditional upfront window. As the market evolves away from long-term deals toward more agile, data-driven strategies, staying prepared and adaptable is more critical than ever.

*Sources: Digiday, Adweek, NBCUniversal, Ad Age, MediaPost*

### Who do you shop for?



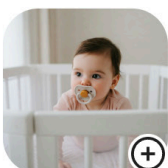
Men



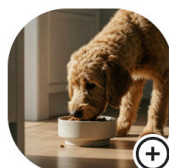
Women



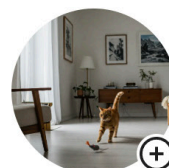
Kids



Baby



Dog



Cat

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/UPDATES

# Amazon Quietly Retreats from Google Shopping

By [Jacob Simonich](#), Associate Director, Paid Search

In late July, Amazon suddenly pulled all investment from Google Shopping Ads both in the U.S. and internationally, catching both Google and other advertisers by surprise. The e-commerce giant previously held a near 60% impression share in the U.S. market in Google shopping results. In 2018, Bloomberg reported that Amazon was spending over \$50 million on Google Shopping ads alone. This move came just days after a record-breaking Prime Day; the company's 10th anniversary of the iconic annual sales event.

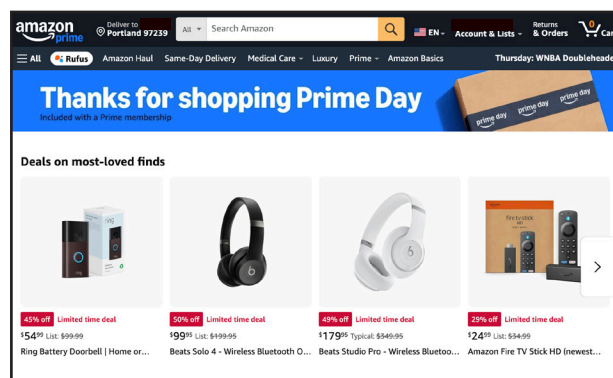
## What is Driving the Exit?

Amazon has not shared any information as to why they have pulled all funds from Google Shopping. However, there are many reasons why Amazon would make such a drastic change. Some range from simple testing to a more extreme shift in the digital marketing landscape:

- **Incrementality Testing** – Amazon has a history of increasing and reducing spend across marketing channels, most notably during the early days of the pandemic. This could be the company testing whether Google Shopping brings incremental conversions or if users will land on Amazon organically in a show of brand recognition and loyalty.
- **Reducing Dependency On Google** – Amazon may be testing its relationship with the search engine giant. Spending the money to advertise

on Google ads will reduce the margins for sales on the platform. Ultimately, a move like this could push brand loyal consumers to go directly to Amazon instead of clicking through an ad on the search engine results page (SERP) at a cost-per-click (CPC) premium. However, this could also be a way for Amazon to gain leverage against Google for better pricing on advertising.

- **Development of AI** – Amazon has been developing its own AI-assisted search function on its platform that would allow users to shop brand sites directly, even if the brand does not sell directly through the giant. Amazon uses AI to expand a user's search across the internet and allows them to stay on Amazon or purchase from the retailer site. This feature is currently in beta but signals a move to topple Google from its position as the top one-stop-shop in e-commerce search.



## Impact to Advertisers

The disappearance of such a large and typically ever-present advertiser in the Google shopping ecosystem has created a vacuum. Amazon's combination of large budgets and reach across many product types have put competitive pressure on advertisers driving up CPCs, especially during Amazon's promotional events like Prime Day. It's expected that without that competitive pressure, advertisers will see a dramatic decrease in CPCs. Early reports state that there has been a 1-4% decrease in CPCs. The change will become most apparent should Amazon choose to not participate in Google Shopping during the highly competitive Black Friday/Cyber Monday holiday shopping season.



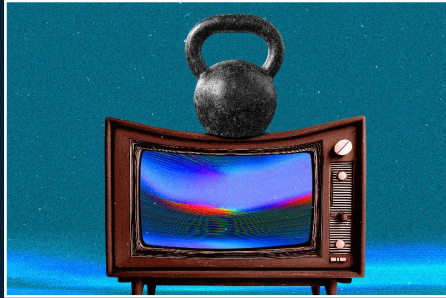
Amazon's exit from Google Shopping isn't just news, it's a strategic and seismic change to the e-commerce and digital marketing landscape. Agile brands who pivot quickly to capitalize on the shift will benefit while others who stand back may be missing an opportunity in an uncertain economy.



While unclear what reasons Amazon has for exiting the Google Shopping auction, this presents opportunity for advertisers:

- **Fill the space fast.** With Amazon gone, now is the time to fill the void left by the e-commerce giant while it still exists. Capitalize on the opportunity for lower CPCs and higher impression share especially heading into an economically uncertain Q4.
- **Monitor, adapt and prepare.** With the uncertainty surrounding this sudden move, it is unclear how the landscape will shift. Audit your campaigns for performance shifts and adjust strategies accordingly. Regularly monitor your auction insights reports for a potential Amazon return or for new players entering your auction space. Prepare to pivot strategies or move spend to other channels or tactics based on sharp changes in performance. This includes performance on Amazon storefronts in addition to Google shopping.

**/QUICK HITS**



The Future of Streaming Is Different Ad Loads for Each Viewer

[\[AdWeek\]](#)



Amazon Quietly Blocks AI Bots From Meta, Google, Huawei And More

[\[Digiday\]](#)



ESPN Goes All-In For 'All-In-One' Streamer, App Launch

[\[Mediapost\]](#)

**Need More Guidance?**



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