BUILDING A SMARTER DATA COLLABORATION IN COMMERCE MEDIA

THE POWER OF A CLEAN ROOM IS WHEN TWO PARTIES MERGE THEIR FIRST-PARTY DATA. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT ALL DATA CLEAN ROOMS RELY ON CLOUD-BASED TECHNOLOGY FOR THEIR OPERATION. A DATA CLEAN ROOM (DCR) REQUIRES ZERO PERMANENT COPY OF THE DATA.

As retailer first-party data becomes central to audience strategy and campaign measurement, clean rooms are gaining traction as essential tools for privacy-safe collaboration. Yet, confusion persists, from assumptions about universal measurement capabilities to misconceptions around data privacy. This Blueprint for Data Collaboration in Commerce Media will unpack five common myths surrounding Clean Rooms and reveal the critical questions every brand, retailer, and tech partner should ask before choosing a provider.

From a customer perspective, transparency matters: "What are we doing, and would they be comfortable with it?" Ultimately, the goal is to protect the customer, balancing value with privacy.

Retailer data is often siloed by channel: Web, Mobile, Offline... Integrating via a Customer Data Platform (CDP), or a sophisticated CRM, is the first step to then make it available via a clean room.

There are two types of DCRs: infrastructure and application. Infrastructure DCRs operate in the cloud, and application DCRs are built on top of the infrastructure either by the same company or a third party.

This Blueprint was co-created with our members based on a session at our Retail Media Impact Summit in September 2025 and in consultation with a number of DCR providers.

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COMMON MYTHS ABOUT CLEAN ROOMS

ALL CLEAN ROOMS OFFER THE SAME LEVEL OF PRIVACY

While many clean rooms tout privacy by default, not all are created equal. In particular, the use of a data clean room does not in itself ensure compliance with the GDPR. All data processing activities conducted within a clean room environment must still adhere to all GDPR provisions, including lawfulness, purpose limitation, data minimisation and accountability. Organisations should assess this on a case-by-case basis to ensure that appropriate legal bases, safeguards and data protection measures are in place. Clean rooms designed with privacy by default often have hardcoded privacy protections that prevent breaches, making compliance easier. Conversely, privacy-by-design platforms often allow users to tailor privacy requirements, which can lead to variability in implementations. They typically enable a broader set of marketing use cases.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How do you, as an organisation, balance the importance of achieving results while ensuring users' privacy is fully respected?
- How granular should measurement be?
- Is your organisation better suited to building a custom solution or out-of-the-box?

YOUR IDENTITY GRAPH MUST BE NATIVE TO THE CLEAN ROOM

Many believe a clean room only works if you use the provider's own identity graph. This can create lock-in and limit interoperability. An ID graph is primarily useful for cross-publisher or retailer attribution and frequency capping. However, it's not a requirement for all clean rooms, nor does each provider offer a universal and standardised ID graph, especially since there is no common ID system across media owners and markets.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Can I bring my own identity resolution provider or interoperate with others?
- What is my primary use case for clean rooms? Does it require cross-publisher/retailer measurement?
- What tools am I using for activation?
- What IDs do they require?

CROSS-CHANNEL APPLICATIONS ARE THE SAME ACROSS CLEAN ROOMS

Integrating clean rooms across multiple channels often involves connecting data through data lakes or identifiers stored in cloud providers or CDP platforms. Since data sharing varies - especially between platforms like Meta and Google - the approach and capabilities differ significantly. Not all Clean Rooms have the same network of publishers and DSPs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do you provide user-level, deduplicated, SKU-level measurement, or just aggregated exports?
- What level of access do you have to Walled Garden Data?
- How do you activate the data?
- Do you have the capacity to use a different DCR for each Walled Garden, RMN, publisher, or prefer a unified UX?
- What publishers and DSPs are in the DCR's network?

ALL CLEAN ROOM APPLICATIONS REQUIRE A DATA SCIENTIST

While some clean rooms are Structured Query Language (SQL) or Python-based and require data science expertise, there are also no-code or low-code solutions that enable users to perform simpler tasks. The end user, in the latter case, will be a marketer. No code DCRs UIs are often built on a cloud-based environment of a different provider.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Who is the primary user of my Clean Room? Internal and External?
- What are the main use cases for my Clean Room?
- How important is ease of use to my organisation versus detailed control?

ALL CLEAN ROOM DATA IS DETERMINISTIC

The market seems to prefer deterministic data, but clean rooms can be probabilistic.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What is the value of any data extrapolation, and what does it allow me to do?

OPEN QUESTIONS WHEN IMPLEMENTING CLEAN ROOMS

Economic Model: Who bears the cost, and when? For some platforms, infrastructure costs are significant, and the economics are still evolving. Is it one side or both paying?

Data Granularity: How deep should data go? For example, should insights be available down to individual shows or specific impression levels? Does the data owner have the controls they need to manage this simply?

Tech Stack: What elements are required in my tech stack to successfully activate and measure using data clean rooms? Note: IAB Europe aims to provide an explainer for this in 2026.

INTEROPERABILITY AND CLEAN ROOMS

Clean rooms don't speak to each other or interoperate. They are on different protocols because clouds are built differently. Some APIs can be built on top. When using those APIs, the data will be copied into a different environment.

Interprobability is a significant challenge for clean rooms, primarily limited to interactions via APIs. Which clean room to operate usually boils down to business negotiations. In the case of one party having stricter privacy requirements than another, the decision becomes clearer. For example, banks or health care providers might have stricter requirements than publishers. If HSBC has its own clean room, it may require publishers to engage exclusively with their platform due to stricter compliance rules.

USE CASES

The two most common use cases for clean rooms in Retail Media are brands augmenting their data set with RMN data for:

- Audience Building and Activation
- Measurement and Insights

Clean rooms are not designed to solve entirely new use cases but instead enable existing workflows in a more privacy-compliant manner.

EMERGING USE CASES:

Data sharing within Retail Media Networks (RMNs), such as collaboration between BLOCK and Tesco, exemplifies how complementary data sets - like SKU-level insights from Tesco and broader consumer data from BLOCK - can create "better together" strategies

Cross-retailer measurement enables brands to evaluate their performance across multiple supply partners through clean rooms

RMNs are matching their first-party data with CTV publishers to help brands boost targeting when activating on CTV

Third-party RMN Measurement providers setting up DCRs to measure things like reach and frequency, incrementality, etc

Social media and CTV partners are embracing cross-screen measurement in the clean room space using individual-level data matched deterministically for RMNs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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