

A self-help book

The Many Iterations of Curation.

Your Curation Index.
With pictures.



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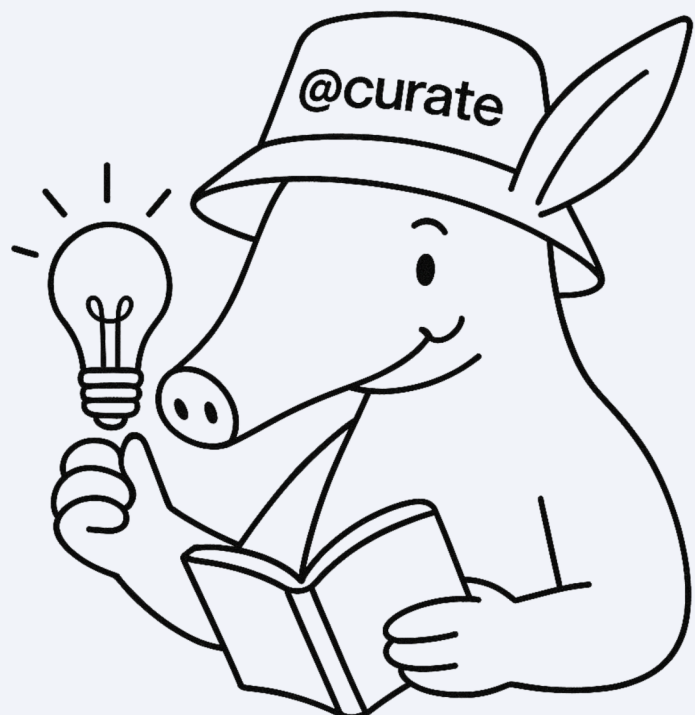
Introduction

Curation has become the second-loudest buzzword of 2025 (*AI still wins by a landslide*). And, just like the wellness era of social media, where every Tom, Dick, and Carol proclaimed themselves a wellness influencer, the curation era is following the same path. Everyone who's anyone is doing curation.

It's become the term that somehow means everything and nothing all at the same time.

The irony? Every definition is technically valid.

Curation is, after all, a mass noun; a broad concept rather than a countable thing, so it's no wonder the industry has stretched, squeezed, and interpreted it into multiple variations.



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But in an industry addicted to over-complication and obfuscation, it's somewhat unhelpful to introduce a term that's supposed to do the complete opposite: *simplify the mess, calm the madness, and bring some long-sought clarity.*

So we decided to lay it all out.

Every version. Every flavour. No right or wrong, just the industry's **Curation Index** in one place, designed to help you finally see the wood for the trees.

Some observations from across the industry:

- Publishers are already doing “curation” without knowing it.
- SSPs have their own curated layers.
- Agencies are building curated marketplaces (with varying degrees of transparency).
- Sustainability players curate low-carbon pathways.
- Contextual vendors curate mood, mindset, and meaning.
- And buyers? They're trying to navigate all of it while still being judged on CPA, CTR and so on...



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Not all curation is *equal*

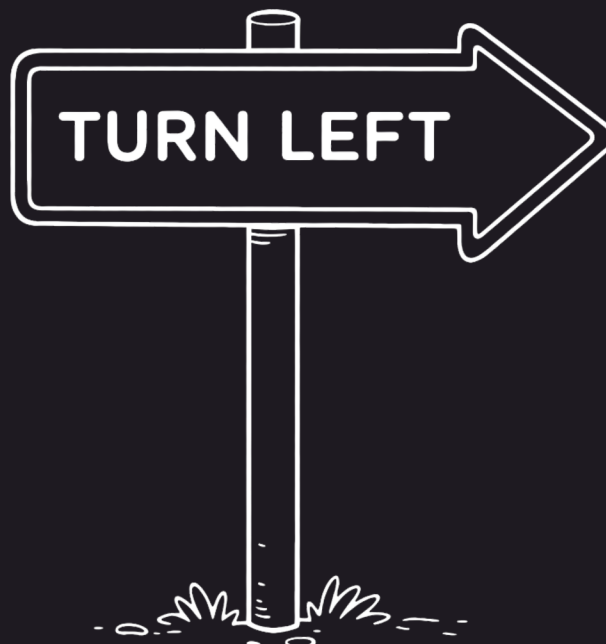
Different vendors prioritise different angles - data, safety, publisher-focused, vertical-specific - all designed to strengthen their position in the chain.



But if you're adopting curation as a whole, the only person who should hold that strength and power is you: the client.

The one using curation to streamline workflows, improve quality, create efficiency, or build a new business - not to prop up someone else's margins.

Isn't it ironic?
Don't you think?



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The Curation *Index*

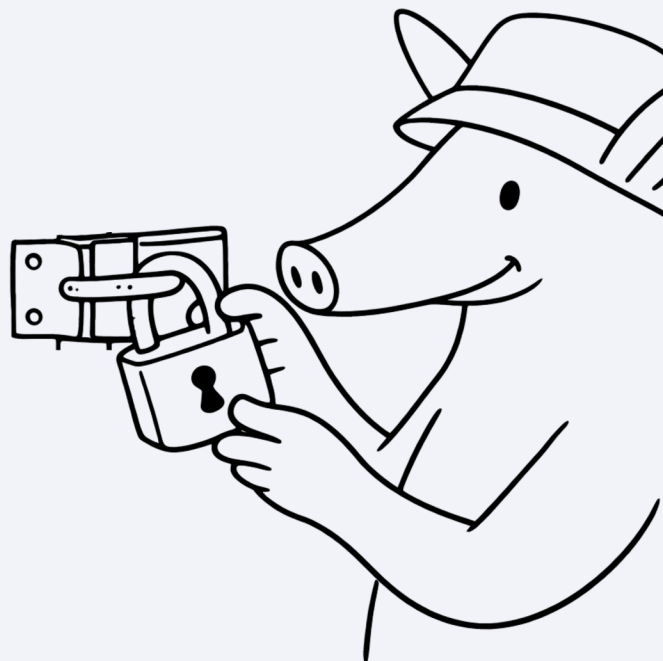
Brand Safety & Contextual Curation

Example: *Mantis*

*Think content categorisation + safety layers
+ pooled inventory.*

What it does: *Unlocks demand in “safer”
cultural and lifestyle environments.*

The catch: *Publishers don’t always know
who applied the targeting, how it was valued,
or whether the uplift is real. It happens
around them and to them, not with them.*



Sustainability-Led Curation

Example: *Scope3*

*Curating low-carbon supply paths,
making sustainability a built-in quality
check.*

What it does: *Normalises greener
buying.*

The catch: *It’s no longer a differentiator -
it’s become a hygiene.*



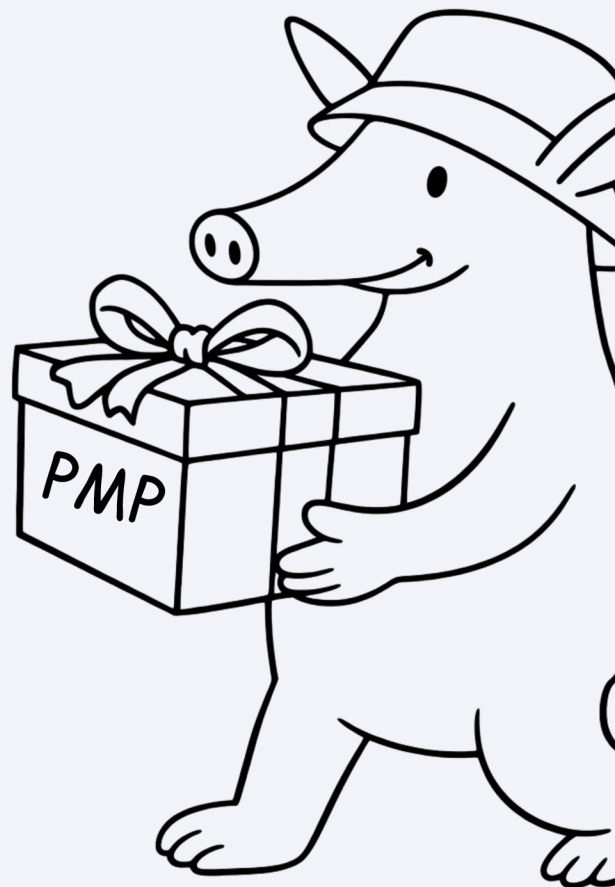
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Agency-Led Curated Marketplaces

Example: GroupM, PMX, The7Stars
Large pre-packaged PMPs designed to centralise quality.

What it does: Makes buying easier. Offers scale and consistency.

The catch: Publishers fear audience flattening. Buyers aren't suddenly spending more because of curation.
And a lot of fees get lost in the middle.



SSP-Led Curation (aka: The Messy Middle)

Example: Index Exchange curated layers, Magnite curated solutions

SSPs bundle data and inventory into curated "products."

What it does: Offers reach.

The catch: Value attribution is muddy.
Fees stack.



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Full Scope Curation

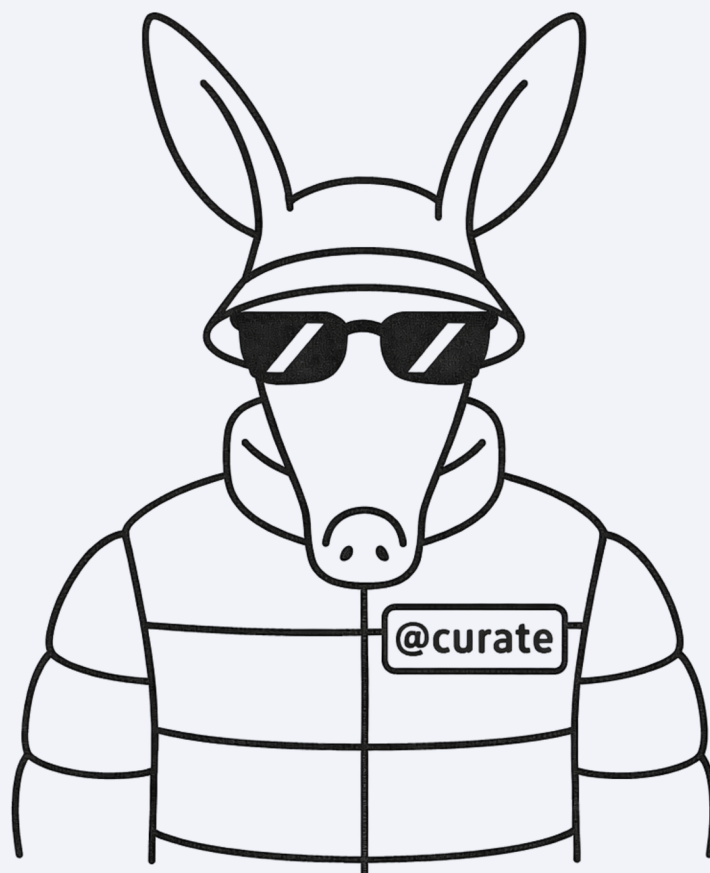
Example: @curate

Publishers pooling inventory, data, and rules on their terms, using transparent pipes designed for buyers.

What it does:

- *Moves publishers closer to buyers*
- *Applies data at the source (not filtered through three layers of intermediaries)*
- *Improves scale (hello Safari)*
- *Offers radical transparency*
- *Reduces duplicate fees*
- *Gives buyers confidence in the quality they're paying for*

The catch: *It requires collaboration and proper governance. But, it's the only model with benefits that compound rather than dilute.*



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Barriers to *market.*

Agency land:

Many are still dubious of curation and what is actually offers.

Why?

1. CPA is still the 'God' metric. *And CPA punishes quality. It rewards whoever can game last-click attribution, not whoever can deliver incremental sales.*

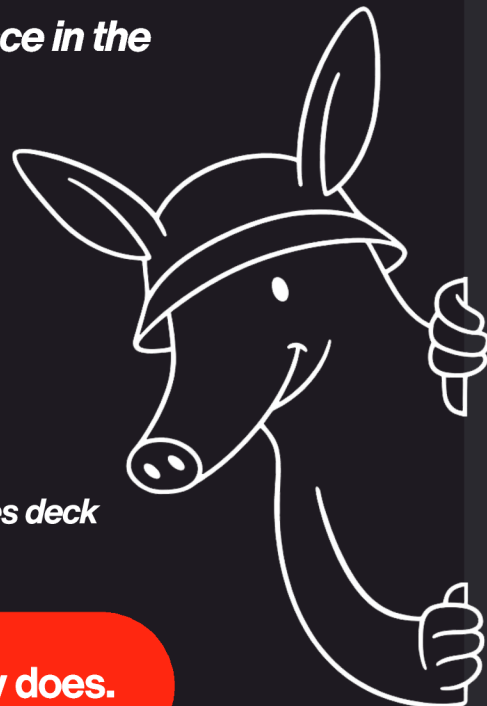
2. Buyers need new KPIs. *Think regression modelling, incrementality testing, and quality-based metrics. Not "did it convert within 0.3 seconds while the user was in a car park?"*

3. Trust is still fragile. *Removing verification layers requires a high level of confidence in the pipes and partners.*

4. Transparency is everything.

Buyers want to know:

- *Who defined the audience*
- *How it was built*
- *What criteria were used*
- *Where the fees live*
- *Whether the quality holds up beyond a sales deck*



Curation won't scale until transparency does.

Barriers to *market.*

Publisher Land:

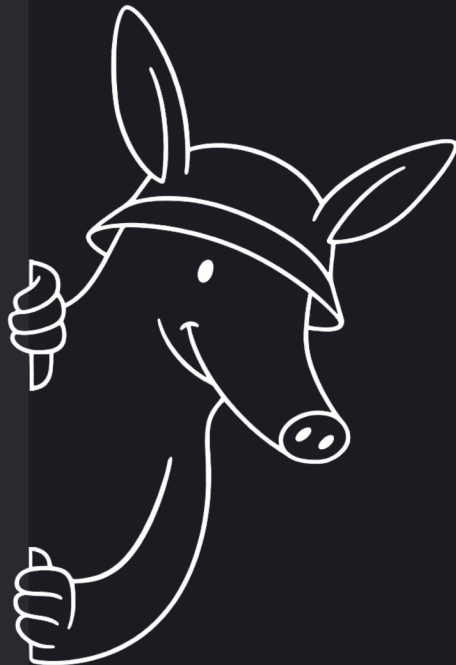
Publishers want to believe, but they're not naïve.
(Oooo, *that rhymes*).

Publishers do see real opportunity, however, they see it wrapped in real caution.

The hesitation:

- Fear of commoditisation
- Too many intermediaries taking too much value
- Effort required to understand 6–10 different curation models
- CPMs that sometimes drop in curated marketplaces
- Partners over-promising and under-explaining
-

For publishers, the question isn't "Should I curate?"
It's "*who do I trust to curate with me, not at me?*"



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The pattern is clear:

everyone wants the same thing.

On paper, curation should be able to deliver all of that. In practice, most models only manage one or two - usually at the expense of someone else in the chain.

And that's where the real problem (and the real opportunity) begins.

The only model that satisfied everyone? *Supply-side curation.*

This is where @curate's perspective landed, and where the market is quietly heading.

Supply-side curation is the only approach that starts at the source, rather than retrofitting fixes downstream. It eliminates duplicated work across DSPs and SSPs, removes unnecessary fees, and finally gives buyers the transparency they've been asking for.

It also keeps publishers in control of their value, not passing it through three layers of intermediaries, who all take a cut. By applying data on the sell side, scale increases, especially across Safari and other cookie-light environments, and the entire supply chain becomes clean and more auditable. In short, it improves outcomes for everyone from top to bottom.

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**This isn't a reinvention
of programmatic.**

It's a **correction** of it.

**Curation should bring publishers and
buyers closer together. Not introduce
more layers in between.**



**With love, Archie.
Adtech's most
loved Aardvark.**
