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WHITEPAPER

AdCP vs AAMP

Comparing the Emerging Standards for Agentic Advertising

An architectural comparison of the Ad Context Protocol (AdCP) and IAB Tech Lab's Agentic Advertising Management Protocols (AAMP) , and what their coexistence means for advertising technology.

Key takeaways

AdCP is a single, versioned protocol specification; AAMP is IAB Tech Lab's umbrella of standards, SDKs, an execution framework, and a trust registry.

Their business functions overlap substantially: buyer and seller agents, discovery, planning, negotiation, transactions, and audiences, so "one is for buying, the other for bidding" is misleading.

The harder questions are interoperability and bounded agent authority, not which protocol wins.

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1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence is changing the way digital advertising can be bought, sold, and optimized. Traditional advertising workflows rely on a combination of advertisers, agencies, DSPs (demand-side platforms), SSPs (supply-side platforms), publishers, ad servers, and human operators. Each platform typically exposes its own APIs, workflows, and business rules.

Agentic advertising introduces a different model. Instead of a human manually coordinating every step, AI agents can represent buyers and sellers and perform tasks such as discovering inventory, evaluating opportunities, negotiating terms, creating transactions, exchanging audience signals, managing campaigns, and optimizing outcomes. For this model to work at scale, agents need a common language. Two initiatives receiving significant attention in this area are the Ad Context Protocol (AdCP) and the Agentic Advertising Management Protocols (AAMP) from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) Tech Lab.

Although both address agentic advertising and have substantial functional overlap, they are not simply two competing implementations of the same protocol. AdCP is a versioned protocol specification that organizations can implement, while AAMP is a broader IAB Tech Lab umbrella encompassing multiple standards, protocols, SDKs, reference implementations, and trust mechanisms.

This paper examines the two approaches, their similarities and differences, and what their coexistence could mean for the future of advertising technology.

2 Why does Advertising need Agentic Protocols?

Consider a traditional media-buying workflow:



Figure 1. A traditional media-buying workflow — multiple participants, each with its own APIs and interfaces.

Each participant may expose different APIs and interfaces. A campaign can involve campaign setup, audience selection, inventory discovery, pricing, deal negotiation, creative management, targeting, measurement, optimization, and reporting. Many of these operations are already automated, but they are generally controlled by predefined software integrations.

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The Agentic Advertising Model

Agentic advertising changes the interaction model: AI agents can potentially perform these activities on behalf of their organizations, coordinating through a shared protocol rather than a human mediating every handoff. However, autonomy creates a new problem.

> How does one agent reliably understand what another agent means?

A human can interpret an ambiguous statement and ask a follow-up question. An autonomous system cannot safely rely on that level of ambiguity when the result could be a financial transaction. This is why standardized schemas, protocols, identity, authorization, security, trust, and governance become increasingly important.

3 The Stack: Where MCP, A2A, AdCP, and AAMP Fit

Before looking at AdCP and AAMP individually, it helps to separate them from MCP and A2A. Model Context Protocol (MCP) and Agent2Agent (A2A) are general agent communication mechanisms: they are not themselves advertising standards, and both AdCP and AAMP can use them as transports. A simplified stack could look like this:

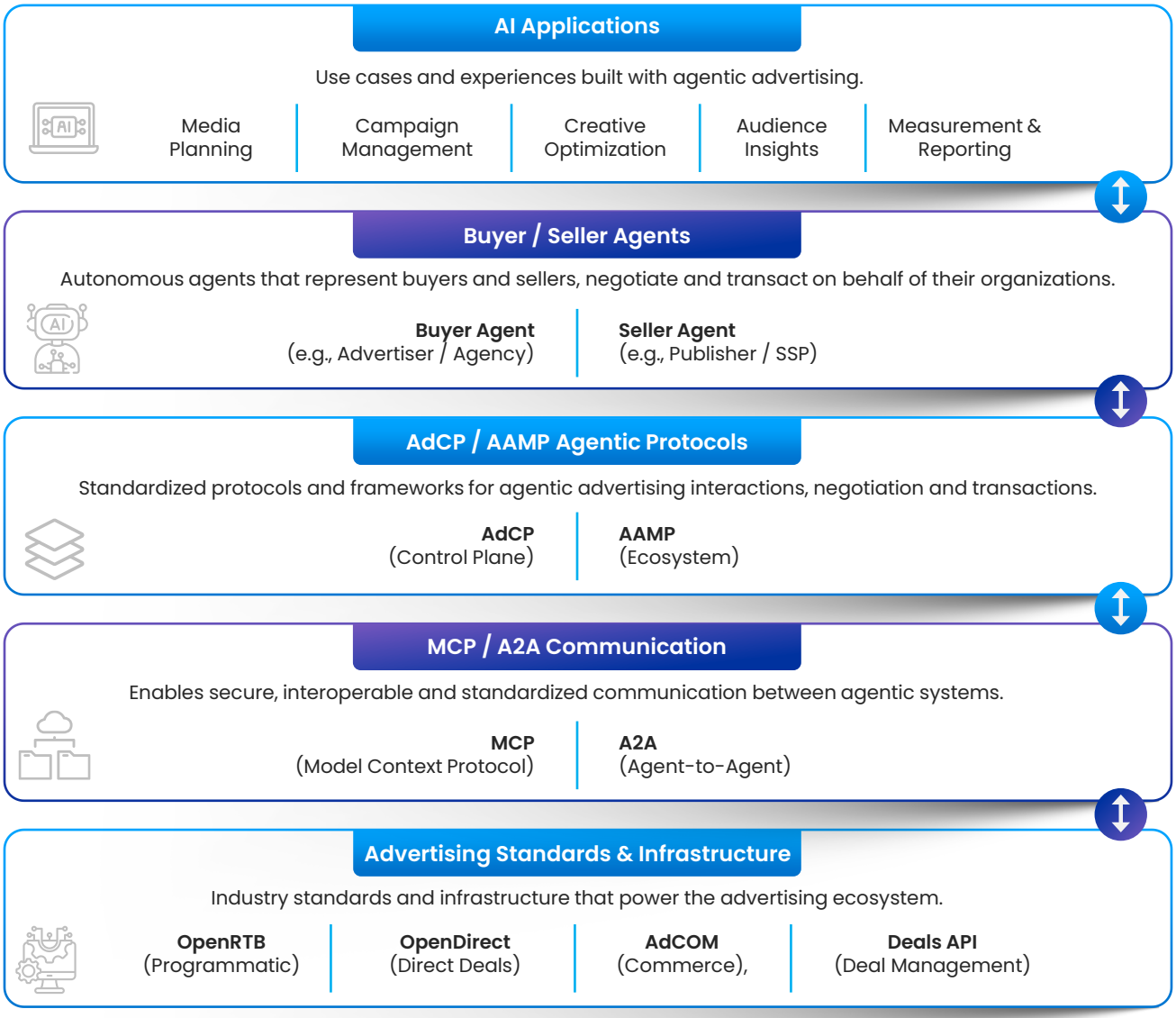


Figure 2. Where MCP, A2A, AdCP, and AAMP sit relative to each other.

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This distinction matters because it prevents communication protocols and advertising protocols from being treated as direct competitors. It also works the other way: shared MCP support does not by itself make AdCP and AAMP complementary. As IAB Tech Lab has pointed out, MCP is a communication substrate, it does not reconcile the two frameworks' advertising semantics. [1]

4 What is AdCP?

The Ad Context Protocol (AdCP) is an open protocol designed for advertising use cases and agent-driven advertising operations. The AdCP ecosystem provides a standardized way for advertising agents and systems to perform advertising-related operations instead of requiring every participant to build a completely custom integration. The project provides documentation, protocol schemas, reference implementations, SDKs, and conformance-related assets.

AdCP was launched in October 2025 by an industry consortium and is now a project of AgenticAdvertising.org, a nonprofit trade association whose voting members span brands, agencies, publishers, and technology providers. A reference sell-side implementation is maintained separately by the Prebid community. [2] AdCP 3.0 reached general availability in April 2026, and the project publishes releases on a planned cadence, with the next major version targeted for early 2027. [3] At a high level:

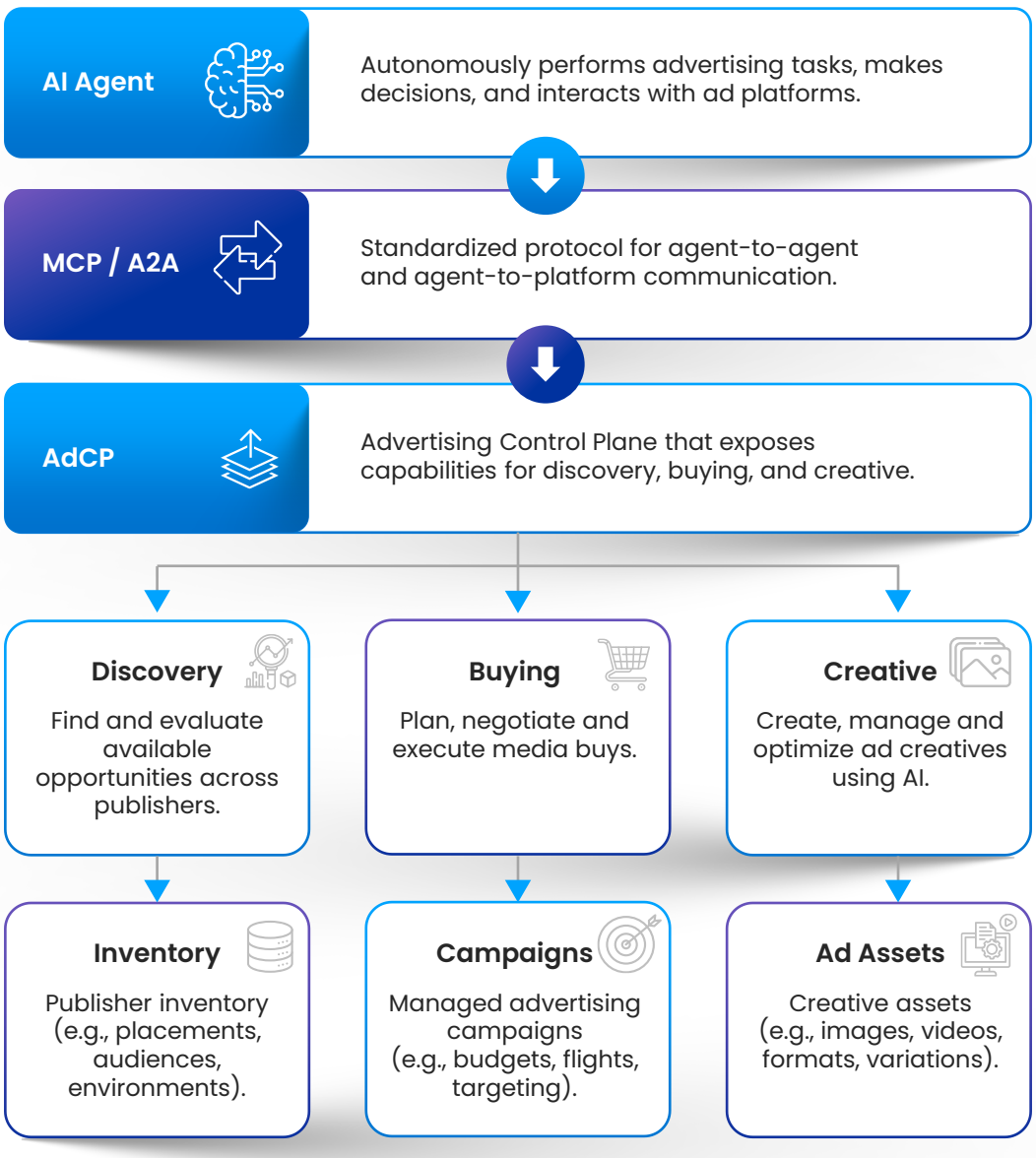


Figure 3. AdCP at a high level.

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AdCP covers advertising workflows including media buying, inventory discovery, audience and signal workflows, creative, accounts, governance, measurement, brand-related operations, and serve-time decisioning. These are organized into protocol domains:Media Buy, Creative, Signals, Accounts, Governance, and Brand,each with named tasks, plus a Trusted Match Protocol for serve-time activation of pre-negotiated packages. [2]

The important concept is that an agent can interact with an advertising system through standardized advertising operations.

5 What is AAMP?

Agentic Advertising Management Protocols (AAMP) is an IAB Tech Lab initiative for bringing agentic capabilities into the digital advertising ecosystem. A key distinction is that AAMP is not a single protocol: IAB Tech Lab describes it as an umbrella initiative covering three pillars: Agentic Foundations, Agentic Protocols, and Trust and Transparency.

The objective is to enable agentic systems while building the existing advertising standards ecosystem. IAB Tech Lab's approach is explicitly based on extending established standards rather than creating an entirely separate advertising language.

Existing standards such as OpenRTB (the real-time bidding protocol), OpenDirect (the API framework for direct and programmatic-guaranteed deals), the Deals API (IAB Tech Lab's standard for deal and private-marketplace terms), and AdCOM (the common data model both standards draw on) provide the underlying advertising concepts that agents can use.

AAMP has continued to evolve rapidly. IAB Tech Lab released AAMP 2.3 on July 30, 2026, describing the release as bringing enterprise-grade deployment, privacy diligence, pricing integrity, broader platform support, and industry standards together for production-oriented agentic advertising. [4] AAMP 3.0, announced on September 22, 2026, then added OpenProposal, a specification for the planning stage of a deal: how buyer and seller agents discover, package, and evaluate proposals, from an RFP through to a buy commitment, connecting to AdCOM, OpenDirect, and the Deals API.

OpenProposal is currently a draft open for public comment until October 22, 2026, so it is not yet a ratified standard. [5][6] The release also strengthens safeguards around pricing, orders, agent identity, and duplicate transactions, which bears directly on the bounded-authority question discussed later in this post. [5][7]

This matters when comparing AAMP with AdCP because AAMP is not a static specification, it's an evolving collection of standards and implementations. The current AAMP structure includes projects such as Agentic Direct, Buyer Agent, Seller Agent, Agentic Audiences, the Agentic Real-Time Framework (ARTF), Agent Registry, and OpenProposal.

Pillar 1: Agentic Foundations

The first pillar focuses on the infrastructure required to run agentic services efficiently and safely. A major component is the Agentic Real-Time Framework (ARTF), which provides a framework for agent services operating inside a host platform, including real-time advertising environments.

The model uses containerized services that can be deployed into the host's infrastructure, allowing specialized services to participate in real-time processing while maintaining standardized interfaces and operational controls. This is particularly relevant to high-performance advertising workflows where latency matters.

Consider a traditional bid request: it arrives carrying impression details such as user, context, inventory, and device; a DSP evaluates it against its models and business rules, decides whether and how much to bid, and sends back a bid response, all within a round trip of a few hundred milliseconds.

That entire process has to happen within extremely tight latency constraints, and a general-purpose large language model (LLM) can't simply be inserted into this path and allowed to reason for several seconds. ARTF addresses this by defining a model where specialized agent services can run within the host platform's infrastructure.

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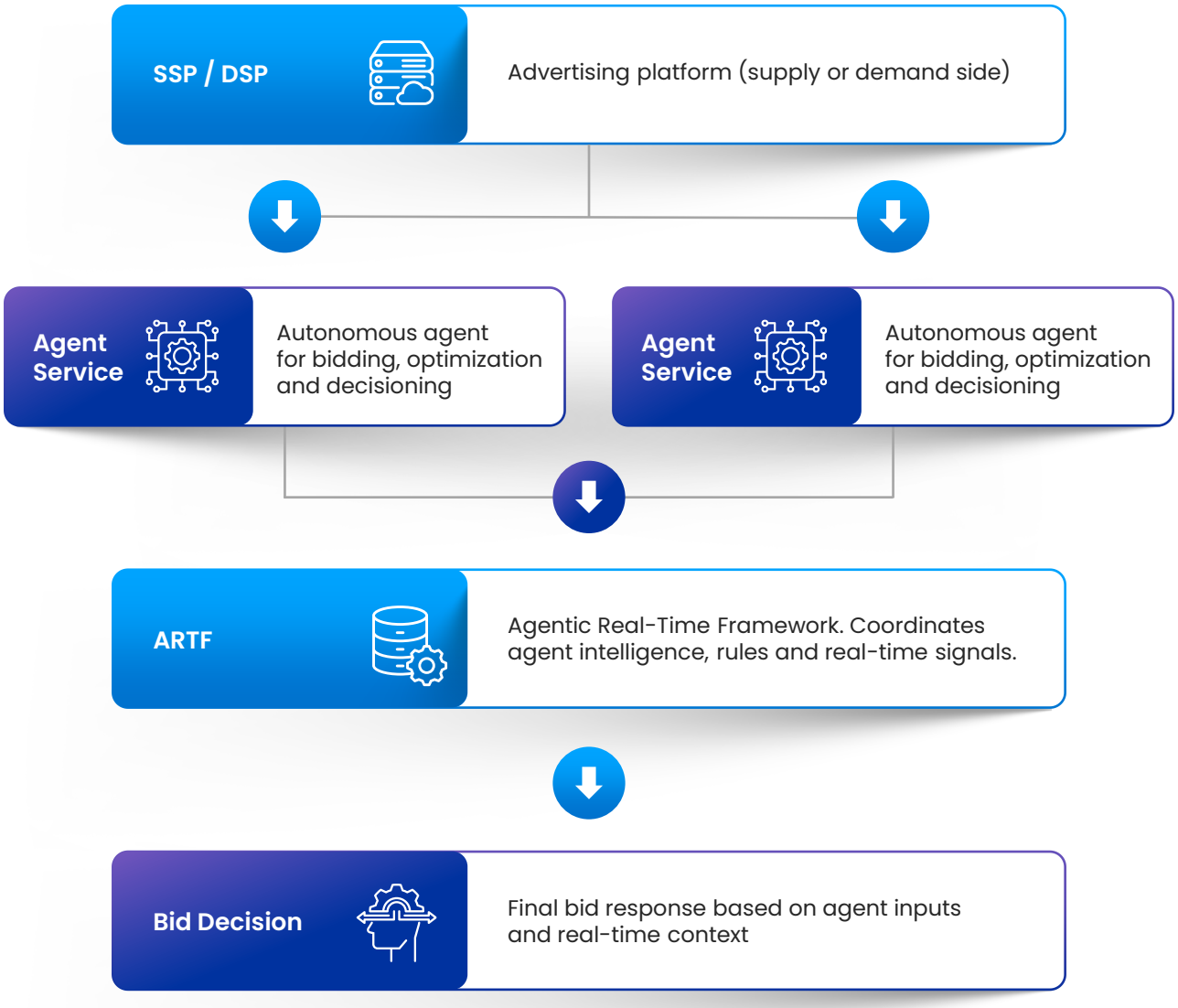


Figure 4. ARTF — agent services running inside host infrastructure.

When it released ARTF for public comment, IAB Tech Lab stated that the framework was designed to reduce bid request/response latency by up to approximately 80%, using standardized container and API mechanisms that remove external network hops. [8][9][10] Version 1.0 of the specification was subsequently declared final on August 12, 2026. [11]

This illustrates an important principle: agentic advertising doesn't necessarily mean putting an LLM directly into every real-time decision. Instead, an agent can orchestrate or configure specialized services that perform deterministic, high-performance operations.

One caution: ARTF is sometimes treated as if it were AAMP as a whole. It is one real-time component of the Foundations pillar - AAMP's Buyer and Seller Agents cover the wider campaign and transaction lifecycle, including direct, deal-based, and programmatic-guaranteed buying. [1]

Pillar 2: Agentic Protocols

The second pillar provides the management and interaction layer - protocols and reference implementations that let buyer agents, seller agents, and advertising technology systems interact across discovery, planning, negotiation, transactions, orders and deals, signal exchange, and campaign setup. For example:

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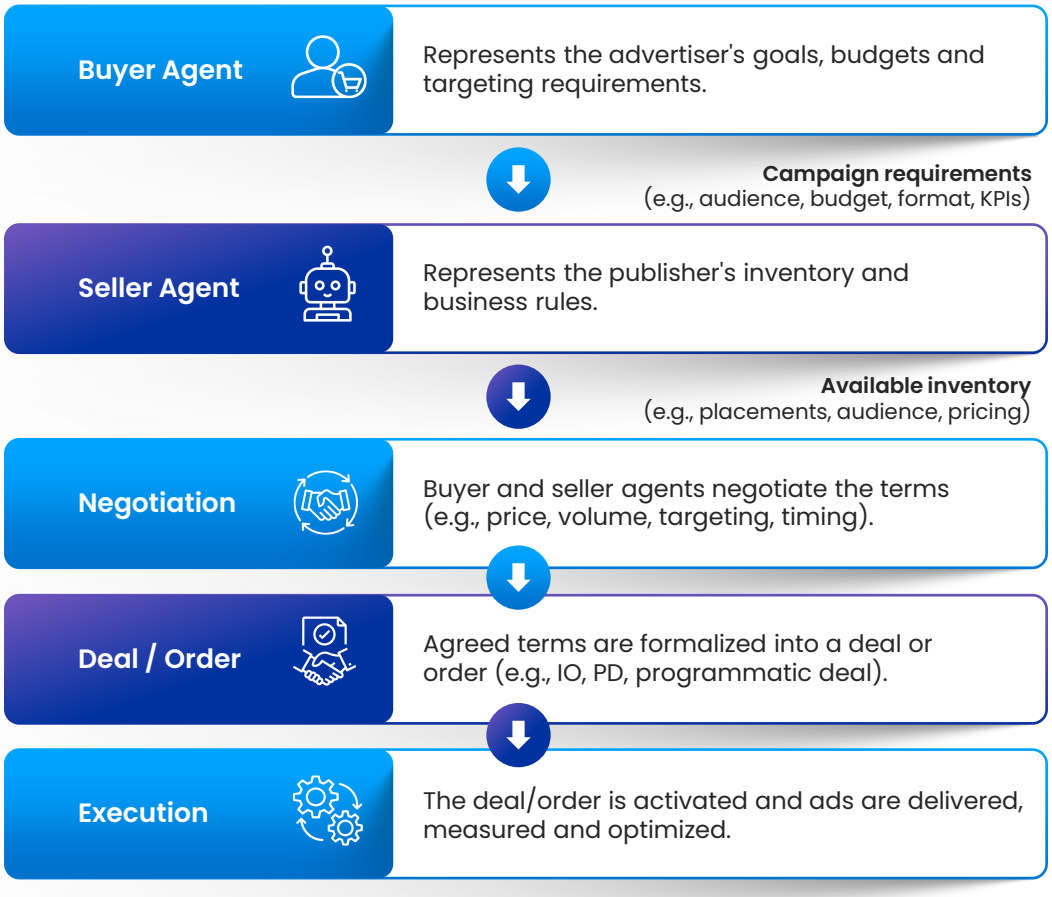


Figure 5. Agentic Protocols — the interaction layer.

AAMP's Agentic Direct work also demonstrates how agentic workflows can be mapped onto existing standards — the Agentic Direct SDK uses OpenDirect as a primitive.

Building on existing advertising standards

One of the strongest aspects of the AAMP approach is its emphasis on existing advertising standards. Rather than creating a completely new advertising vocabulary, AAMP maps agentic capabilities onto established standards:

Existing standard	Agentic extension / application
OpenDirect	Agentic Direct
Deals API	Agentic Deals
AdCOM	Agentic Ad Objects
OpenRTB / RTB	Agentic bidding workflows
ARTF	Real-time agent services

IAB Tech Lab's published materials describe this strategy of extending existing standards for agentic use cases. This matters because existing advertising standards already encode years of industry experience and interoperability requirements.

Agentic Audiences

Audience targeting is another area where these standards become interesting. AAMP 2.3 includes work on Agentic Audiences (formerly the User Context Protocol, contributed by LiveRamp), including privacy-preserving exchange of audience information using vector embeddings. IAB Tech Lab has also described how Agentic Audiences can be operationalized through OpenRTB and related infrastructure — AAMP 2.3 adds an OpenRTB extension that lets audience vector embeddings travel in the bidstream, along with a Prebid module. [12][13] Conceptually:

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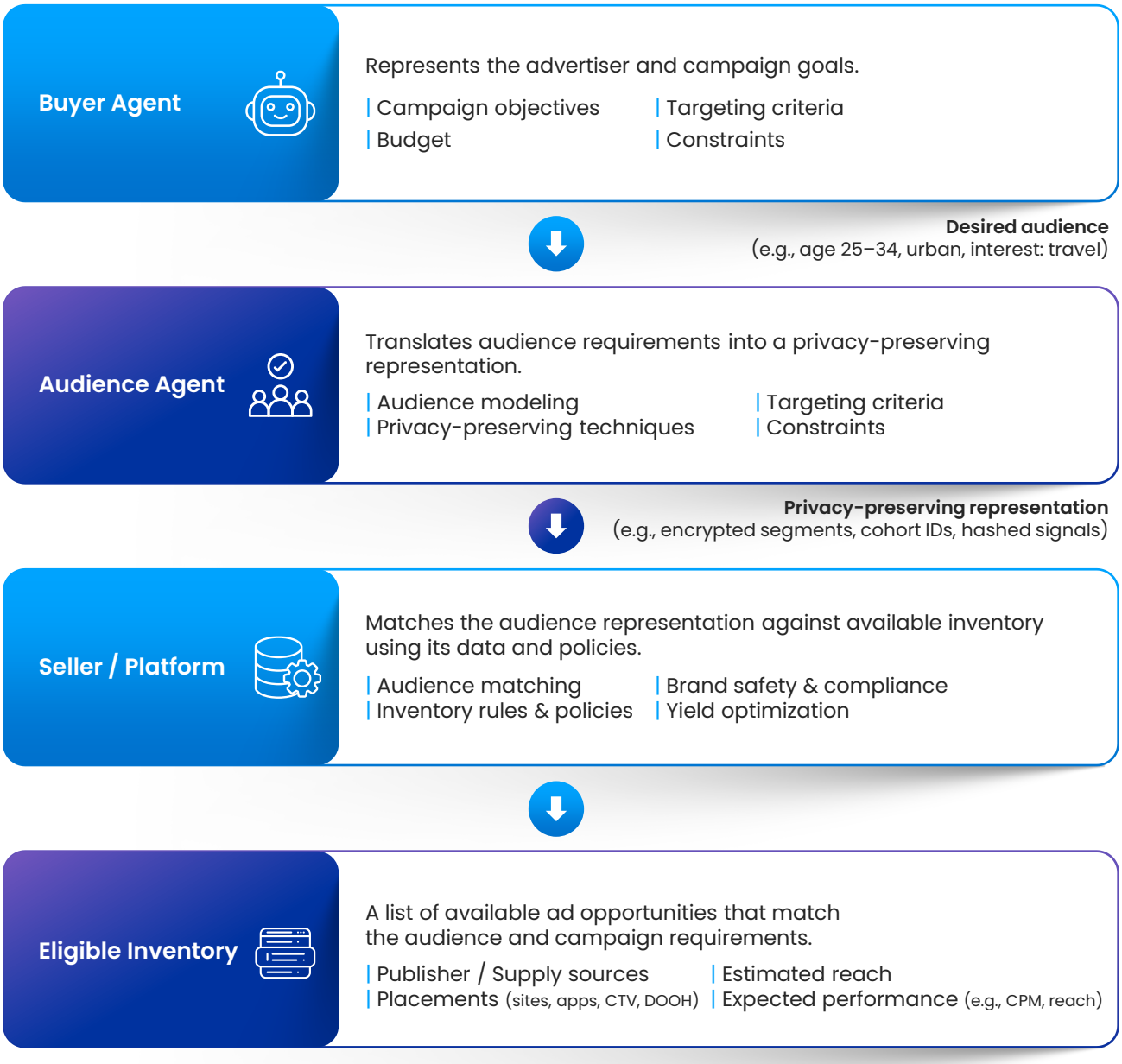
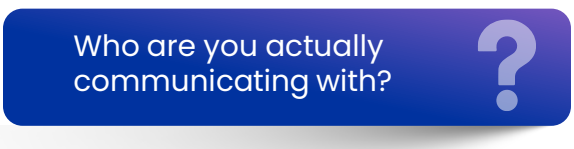


Figure 6. Agentic Audiences — privacy-preserving audience exchange.

This could allow agents to reason about audience similarity without requiring every participant to directly exchange raw user-level data.

Pillar 3: Trust and Transparency

The third pillar addresses one of the most important challenges created by autonomous agents.



AAMP includes an Agent Registry intended to provide transparency around agent identity, verification, and disclosure. This becomes important when an agent is authorized to negotiate or transact on behalf of a company. For example:

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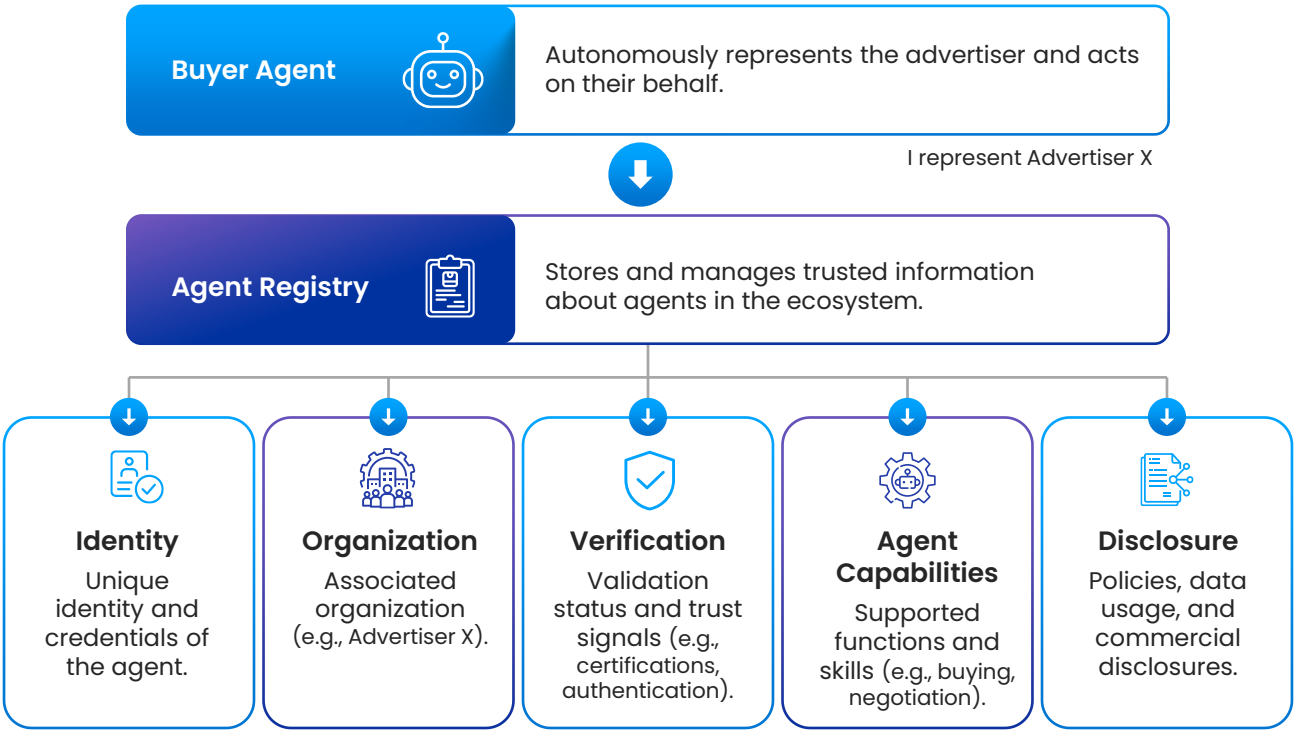


Figure 7. Trust and Transparency — agent identity verification.

Without mechanisms like these, an advertising platform could have difficulty determining whether an incoming agent is legitimate, authorized, properly identified, operating within its declared capabilities, and trustworthy.

6 AdCP vs AAMP: Head-to-Head

The most useful way to compare the two is to separate scope from functionality.

Area	AdCP	AAMP
Type	Protocol specification	Umbrella initiative / framework
Governing organization	AgenticAdvertising.org	IAB Tech Lab
Specification model	Single versioned protocol	Multiple standards / projects under AAMP
Shared functional scope	Buyer and seller agents, discovery, planning, negotiation, transactions, audiences / signals, creative	Same functions, mapped onto existing IAB standards
Real-time / serve-time execution	Trusted Match Protocol (serve-time activation of pre-negotiated packages)	ARTF (host-executed, low-latency agent services) — not a like-for-like counterpart to Trusted Match
Trust / identity	Governance capabilities; AgenticAdvertising.org registry as ecosystem infrastructure	Dedicated Trust & Transparency pillar (Agent Registry)
Existing IAB standards	Can coexist / integrate	Core design principle
Agent transport	MCP and A2A	MCP and A2A
SDKs / reference implementations	Yes — including a Prebid-maintained sell-side implementation	Yes — Buyer Agent, Seller Agent, Agentic Direct SDKs

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The Critical Distinction

There is a significant functional overlap. AdCP's own FAQ explicitly acknowledges overlap in areas including buyer and seller agents, inventory and audience discovery, planning, pricing, negotiation, transaction creation, human approval, campaign management, reporting, and serve-time decisions. [14]

Therefore, a simplistic comparison such as "AdCP is for buying and AAMP is for bidding" would be misleading. The architectural distinction more commonly drawn is this: AdCP is a protocol. AAMP is a broader framework and initiative containing multiple agentic advertising standards and implementations.

Note: IAB Tech Lab has publicly pushed back on framings that separate the two into clean, non-competing layers. In an August 2026 post, IAB Tech Lab's COO Shailley Singh described AdCP and AAMP as frameworks with different design philosophies rather than neatly stacked layers, and listed 13 business functions — including buyer/seller agents, discovery, planning, negotiation, deal creation, agent identity, and serve-time decisioning — where the two overlap directly. [1] Readers evaluating either standard should weigh both the "protocol vs. umbrella" framing above and this more contested, function-level view.

7 A Worked Example: Buyer Agent, Seller Agent, and Bounded Negotiation

Buyer agent and seller agent

One of the clearest ways to understand agentic advertising is through a buyer/seller interaction. Assume an advertiser provides the following requirements:

Campaign parameter	Requirement
Campaign objective	Brand awareness
Budget	$100,000
Audience	Automotive enthusiasts
Geography	United States
Target CPM	$8.00
Frequency	3 impressions/user

The buyer agent can use these requirements to discover opportunities. The seller agent may respond:

Inventory parameter	Offer
Available inventory	5,000,000 impressions
Audience	Automotive
Geography	United States
CPM	$9.00
Estimated reach	1.7M users

The buyer agent can then evaluate whether the opportunity satisfies the advertiser's constraints. This is fundamentally different from simply executing a predefined API call, the agent is potentially interpreting requirements, evaluating alternatives, and making decisions within delegated authority.

Illustrative example — figures are hypothetical, not sourced market data.

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Delegated negotiation authority

This introduces an important concept that doesn't exist in the same way in traditional automated bidding: delegated negotiation authority.

Advertiser authorization

Constraint	Limit
Maximum budget	$100,000
Target CPM	$8.00
Absolute maximum CPM	$8.50
Minimum reach	1.5M users
Maximum buyer offers	3

The agent can negotiate within those boundaries:

Round	Constraint	Limit
1	**Buyer agent**	Offer: $8.00 CPM
2	**Seller agent**	Counter: $9.00 CPM
3	**Buyer agent**	Counter: $8.25 CPM
4	**Seller agent**	Accept
-	**Result**	Transaction executed at $8.25 CPM after two buyer offers (within the $8.50 ceiling and the three-offer limit)

The agent should not be able to accept $9.00 simply because doing so would improve the probability of winning; the authorization boundary must remain enforceable.

How do we define and enforce the maximum authority delegated to an advertising agent?

In practice, that means setting explicit limits on: budget, price, inventory, geography, audience, campaign duration, negotiation rounds, and approval thresholds, which reappear in the evaluation checklist below. This area is particularly important for enterprise adoption, because autonomous decision-making must remain bounded by explicit business rules.

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8 Where AdCP and AAMP Could Coexist

The future doesn't necessarily require one protocol to eliminate the other. A possible ecosystem could look like this:



Figure 8. An illustrative (non-normative) coexistence model for AdCP and AAMP.

In such an environment, AdCP and AAMP could provide different implementations or layers within a broader agentic ecosystem. However, interoperability cannot be assumed. The industry would need agreement around schemas, capabilities, identity, authorization, transaction semantics, error handling, security, privacy, measurement, governance, and versioning. It is worth being explicit that this is a hypothetical model. Today there is no normative AdCP-to-AAMP mapping or interoperability contract, and IAB Tech Lab has cautioned against hybrid architectures that are not grounded in what AAMP actually specifies. [1]

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9 Open Challenges and What to Evaluate

Key challenges

The technical protocols are only part of the problem.

Challenge	Open question
Identity	How does a platform know who an agent represents?
Authorization	What is the agent allowed to do?
Financial limits	What prevents an agent from exceeding its budget or price authority?
Security	What happens if an agent's credentials are compromised?
Trust	How does a buyer determine whether a seller agent is legitimate?
Transparency	How can humans understand why an agent made a particular decision?
Interoperability	How do multiple agent protocols work together?
Accountability	Who is responsible when an autonomous agent makes an incorrect transaction?

These questions will determine whether agentic advertising can move from experimentation to production.

What should companies pay attention to?

For advertisers, agencies, DSPs, SSPs, and publishers evaluating agentic advertising, the important question is not simply "which protocol should we implement?" Instead, organizations should evaluate the following.

What should the agent do, and where?

Candidate workflows include campaign creation, inventory discovery, deal negotiation, audience matching, optimization, and reporting - operating across campaign management, marketplace interaction, transaction management, real-time bidding, and audience processing.

What standards already exist?

Before introducing a new data model, check whether an existing standard: OpenRTB, OpenDirect, AdCOM, or the Deals API,already defines the concepts you need.

What authority should the agent receive?

Start with the kind of limits used in the worked example above:maximum spend, maximum CPM, and maximum buyer offers,and extend them to cover:

Authorization	Example
Approved inventory	Specific publishers / exchanges
Approved audience	Automotive enthusiasts
Approval requirements	Human approval required above a defined threshold

How is the agent identified?

A production system needs reliable identity, authentication, authorization, verification, and capability disclosure - potentially including registry-based verification.

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10 Conclusion

Agentic advertising represents a fundamental change in how advertising systems can interact. The next generation of advertising infrastructure may not simply consist of APIs connecting platforms; it may involve autonomous agents representing advertisers, publishers, DSPs, SSPs, measurement providers, audience providers, and other advertising ecosystem participants.

For that ecosystem to function safely, agents need more than the ability to communicate. They need a shared advertising vocabulary, standardized workflows, explicit authorization boundaries, trusted identities, deterministic execution mechanisms, transparent governance, and auditable decision-making. AdCP and AAMP both address many of the same advertising problems: buyer and seller agents, discovery, planning, negotiation, transactions, signals, and campaign operations. The primary distinction is architectural: AdCP is an open, versioned protocol specification for advertising workflows; AAMP is an umbrella initiative spanning multiple standards, reference implementations, execution frameworks, and trust mechanisms, built on established IAB standards - though, as IAB Tech Lab's own rebuttal reminds us, that layering is more contested in practice than the framing suggests. Therefore, the industry probably shouldn't frame the future as "AdCP vs. AAMP." A more useful question is this:

> How will agentic advertising protocols and standards interoperate to create a trusted, interoperable marketplace?

The eventual architecture may not be defined by one protocol winning over another. It may instead be defined by how well these technologies interoperate, preserve existing advertising standards, enable autonomous decision-making, keep agent authority bounded, maintain security and privacy while providing transparent and auditable transactions.

That is the central challenge and opportunity of agentic advertising.

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