

# ChatGPT Advertising

An educational quick-reference for marketers and business owners  
March 2026 · Evidence-based · Non-commercial



## 800M+

Weekly active users  
*Backlinko — industry estimate*

## 5–6%

Free-to-paid conversion rate  
*Not OpenAI-verified*

## \$60 CPM

Premium ad placement cost  
*Reported by The Information — unconfirmed*

### WHY ADS EXIST ON CHATGPT

**OpenAI is not profitable.** Projected ~\$14B loss in 2026 despite \$12B+ annual revenue. Ads fund the free tier for the 94–95% of users who pay nothing.

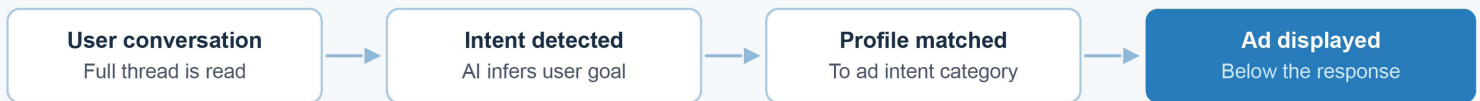
Altman: *"A lot of people want to use a lot of AI and don't want to pay, so we are hopeful this can work."*

### WHO SEES ADS?

Tier	Cost	Sees ads?	User profile
Free	\$0	YES	Casual users, students, explorers — largest group
Go	\$8 / mo	YES	Light users who hit free-tier limits
Plus	\$20 / mo	NO	Daily professionals, power users — ad-free
Pro	\$200 / mo	NO	Research-intensive individual use — ad-free
Business / Enterprise	Custom	NO	Teams, enterprises, institutions — ad-free

*Free-tier users cannot opt out of ads — only personalization. Eliminating ads entirely requires upgrading to a paid tier.*

### HOW TARGETING WORKS: CONTEXTUAL INTENT — NOT KEYWORDS



**Adthema finding (Feb 2026):** Ads appeared on the very first response — not only after extended multi-turn conversations, as initially implied.

### PRIVACY: WHAT'S PROMISED vs. WHAT'S GUARANTEED

#### OpenAI's stated commitments

- ☑ Chats are never shared with advertisers
- ☑ User data is not sold to advertisers
- ☑ Advertisers receive only aggregate data (impressions + clicks)
- ☑ Ad matching occurs inside OpenAI's systems only
- ☑ An ad-free paid tier will always be available

#### CRITICAL DISTINCTION

Every item above is a **policy commitment** — not a technical or structural constraint. OpenAI can update these policies with notice. As of March 2026, none have been independently audited by a third party.

### COST & ACCESS: THE CURRENT REALITY

## \$200K min.

Minimum spend to enter beta

Confirmed by OpenAI to Adweek  
*Some early brands committed \$1M+*

## <100 brands

Hand-selected · invitation only

No self-serve platform as of March 2026  
Broader access expected later in 2026

## CSV only

Weekly — impressions + clicks only

No dashboards · no attribution  
No conversion tracking · no A/B testing

### FOUR QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN UNRESOLVED

#### Does Answer Independence hold long-term?

No audit mechanism exists. Financial pressure on OpenAI may eventually conflict with this commitment.

#### How are ads ranked when multiple qualify?

OpenAI has not disclosed whether bid amounts affect selection. The ranking algorithm is not transparent.

#### Will privacy commitments evolve over time?

Every major ad platform made similar early promises and revised them. No structural reason prevents this.

#### Will ads erode the trust that defines ChatGPT?

Public response at launch was predominantly negative. Long-term user behavior remains to be seen.