KEOMarketing

MARKETER'S GUIDE

November 2014 Edition

Top 7 Changes in Online Advertising

SEARCH - MARKETING - SOCIAL - **MOBILE** - ADVERTISING

Marketer's Guide: Top 7 Changes in Online Advertising

Online advertising is nothing new. This advertising venue has been around quite a while, although it is steadily becoming an increasingly important piece of the advertising pie. The main reason for this is because people spend such a large percentage of their time online, and use that time to educate themselves so that they may make their purchasing decisions online.

For marketers, online advertising is something they must embrace, or at least learn to accept. If they want people to see their message, they need to go where the audience is.

While online advertising itself may not be new, many of the tools, platforms and strategies related to it are. They are also constantly changing, forcing marketers to stay on their toes and constantly be prepared to change strategies quickly as the situation requires.

One of the biggest developments in the recent online advertising landscape is the fact that Google is no longer the clear-cut king of the mountain. Facebook in particular seems to be rapidly challenging that title, thanks in part to their speed in embracing and supporting mobile and display advertising.

Of course, there are also a seemingly never-ending new assortment of tools and tactics that influence how and where B2B marketers should spend their online advertising budgets for the best return on investment. In this report, we'll review the 7 most notable changes in online advertising.

1. Mobile explosion

It is likely no shock to anyone that mobile usage has exploded recently. However, the extreme speed at which mobile has taken off has caught many businesses off guard. Mobile usage has exploded so suddenly that marketers in general have found it difficult to keep up. Many had little or no mobile marketing strategy in place, forcing them to scramble and often make things up on the fly. Even worse, some took no action at all.

Marketers seeking to make a convincing argument to justify an investment into mobile strategies have plenty of hard facts to support their cause. Mobile marketing spend could reach roughly $220 billion by decade's end, with the U.S. portion of that accounting for $70 billion. The key word here is "could." In other words, that's the amount marketers could (and should) reasonably justify spending on mobile, given the huge growth and potential payoff in that area. The reality, however, seems to indicate that actual spending on mobile will fall far short of that benchmark.

Businesses that don't adapt to the mobile landscape as quickly as they should may pay a heavy price. In one recent major survey, 85% of respondents said mobile devices are a central part of everyday life. With so many people (including those who make up a large chunk of a B2B marketer's potential customer base) now greatly reliant upon mobile devices, failure to design content that is mobile-friendly could put your relationships with prospects and existing customers at risk.

Mobile users who can't see your ad content easily or who have difficulty getting critical functions to work correctly will quickly become frustrated and go elsewhere. Those marketers who were quick to appreciate the significant ROI potential of mobile and who have already enacted a mobile strategy (or are in the process of developing one) will likely have a valuable edge over competitors who are dragging their feet.

Helpful tip: B2B marketers who use AdWords can now take advantage of enhanced campaigns. Geared with mobile advertising in mind, this lets you customize the experience for the user. You can choose the specific ad someone sees based in criteria like their location or device type.

2. Video

Savvy B2B marketers have realized the value of video in sharing information and promoting their brand, and many have already found ways to incorporate video into their marketing strategy. This is a smart move, as it's clear that video is an effective way to achieve visibility and awareness among the audience you most want to reach. The majority of buyers and decision-makers seeking B2B products or services (especially those in the tech realm) watch videos for business, and many of them will also share or forward videos they like or find helpful.

In a recent survey, 82% of B2B organizations reported they are experiencing some level of success with current video marketing initiatives, and the majority deemed these efforts either very successful or somewhat successful at achieving important objectives.

Some of the biggest obstacles B2B marketers face in incorporating video into their advertising strategy include a lack of budget, resources or compelling content. However, many also may unknowingly be hampering themselves with the wrong mindset. Some marketers see their main objective in using video advertising to be strengthening brand awareness or generating leads, while overlooking the importance of increasing conversion.

While there are a number of metrics that can be used to gauge the effectiveness of an online video ad, there doesn't seem to be a clear consensus on the single best way to measure success in this area. Some marketers focus on click through rates, while others are more interested in tracking the number of people who watched the video to completion. Still others may be focused on other factors such as brand awareness or visits to the company's main website.

Helpful tips: Don't get too obsessed with fancy video tricks and flashy effects. It's important that the production quality be sufficient that viewers can see your content clearly, of course. But the main priority should be providing information that is important to your target viewer. Often, fancy effects can actually be distracting, so a simple approach is usually better. Think about your ideal customer, and what information and approach would be the best fit for them.

Also, keep your video short and sweet. Generally, a length of about 90 seconds or less seems to be the ideal in general, although if you are hosting the video on your own website you can usually get viewers to watch a video that may be a few minutes long.

3. Programmatic advertising and real-time bidding

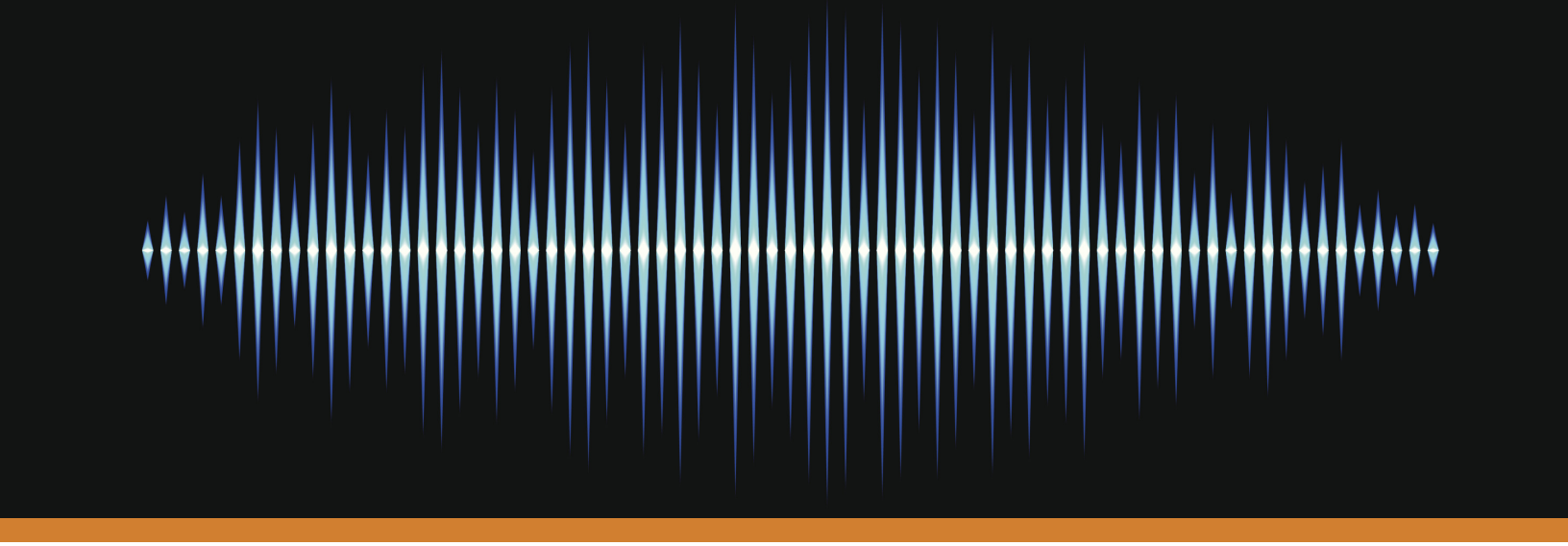
Programmatic advertising is an automated approach to buying digital advertising, using tech-based tools and resources to target specific desired audiences and maximize the budget through careful bidding strategies. Simply put, it is using data and technology to make quick decisions about the ads you create and when/how you distribute them.

You select certain parameters for when and where your ad will appear, choose your targets, supply some text and a few other elements (greatly limited by the constraints of the format), and then the automated process takes over.

B2B marketers may be reluctant to fully embrace programmatic advertising (or find it challenging to get internal buy-in) because of concerns about losing some control over the process, as far as where and when their ads will appear. They also may be uncomfortable about the idea of letting machines handle a process that was traditional handled by humans in a very hands-on way.

However, the data suggests that many marketers are willing to live with those concerns in exchange for the benefits offered by programmatic advertising. This automated process is quickly catching on with marketers. eMarketer estimates U.S. programmatic digital display ad spending will grow 137.1% to eclipse $10 billion this year, accounting for 45.0% of the U.S. digital display advertising market.

A big advantage of the sophisticated automation tools available now is that B2B marketers can use their own internal customer/prospect data to guide them in creating and optimizing ads across various channels in a way that is most effective with their target audience.



Real-time bidding is one valuable component of the programmatic advertising process. This approach means that the advertising buying program can purchase digital ads through real-time auctions, making the process much more efficient and allowing marketers to take advantage of the ad opportunities that best fit their goals and reach their target audience, all at the best price.

Helpful tip: Programmatic advertising is being heralded by many experts as the "future of ad buying," so it's wise for marketers to start educating themselves about the process, as this can help them get the best results while stretching their online advertising budget.

4. Paid amplification for content marketing

Paid advertising is of course nothing new in the online realm, but here we are specifically talking about paid strategies to promote content itself, as opposed to simply advertising a company's products or services.

B2B marketers have been slower than their B2C counterparts in embracing paid content advertising. This is likely due to a combination of factors, including anxiety about relinquishing some control over their content distribution, and also lack of familiarity or awareness about the available tools to help with this process.

While B2B companies do now seem to be gradually increasing their paid content advertising efforts, they need to carefully evaluate their strategies in order to get the best return on their investment and ensure their tactics are a good fit for their goals. The top goals for B2B marketers in using paid content advertising are brand awareness/engagement, lead generation and sales. Since those are broad categories, marketers need to closely evaluate their specific priorities and consider which tactics would best help them achieve their objectives while being most appealing to their target audience.

The paid content advertising tactic most commonly used by B2B marketers appears to be search engine marketing, followed by print/offline promotion, traditional online banner ads, social ads and promoted posts. The top choice is likely not much of a surprise, as search engine marketing has been around for a long time and is something with which many B2B marketers likely feel comfortable. It's also an area in which they can effectively target the people they most want to reach.

Helpful tip: B2B marketers will likely find that their areas of spending will differ from those of B2C businesses. For example, a company that provides large-scale technology solutions generally wouldn't want to invest a lot of time or money in banner ads, but might be better off devoting resources to developing white papers which they can then syndicate.

5. Native advertising with publishers

Native advertising is a hot buzzword in online advertising these days. Many people are using that term, even if they cannot all seem to agree on exactly what it means. In the print media world, native advertising is often used to refer to what used to be called advertorials or custom content, a sort of hybrid between editorial and an advertisement. In the online realm, native advertising is sometimes referred to as in-stream advertising, but it may be easiest to think of it as sponsored content. It is advertising, yes, but it doesn't immediately hit you over the head with a hard sell. Sometimes it may barely mention the company's product or service at all.

The name is inspired by the idea that this form of advertising should be more organic and intuitive than a traditional approach to advertising. It aims to integrate useful, high-quality content seamlessly into the experience of whatever platform the person may be using. Rather than being seen as an annoying interruption, it should enhance the overall content. When done perfectly, native advertising is so unobtrusive that the user doesn't even realize his experience has taken a turn into advertising at all.

Native advertising may be a relatively new thing in the world of online advertising, but it is quickly becoming a popular strategy among many brands. This is due in large part to its effectiveness. Data clearly shows that native advertising has higher viewership and conversion rates than banner ads or other common forms of online advertising.

From a format and style perspective, what native advertising looks like will greatly depend on the platform and situation. In a search environment, it may be in the form of promoted listings, whereas in a social media or news content platform it may appear in-feed mixed in with other content. It is critical that the native advertising be consistent in style and appearance as the rest of the content or information among which it appears.

A good B2B example: UPS put together an interesting, easy-to-digest infographic about changes in the supply chain process, geared toward high-tech industry supply chain decision makers. The infographic fit in seamlessly with the rest of the content on the site (Fast Company), although it contained subtle branding elements such as the company's recognizable brown and yellow color scheme.

Helpful tip: Make your native advertising creative, helpful and interesting. Ideally, it should also be shareable. When appropriate, humor is great, but can be a challenge to pull off well. Consider ways to dice the content up into short, snack-sized chunks that can be released in a series over a period of time.

6. Cross-device tracking

Many people today aren't just using one mobile device, they are using several. As a result, they may be interacting with a brand's content from a variety of devices at different times at incremental stages of the buying cycle before they even make their first purchase or buying decision.

This means their ability to view content and interact with your company via whatever device they may be using at that particular time can have a big influence on their final actions.

Before you can optimize your content for specific devices, it is helpful to know which devices your target audience is using most. Fortunately, many ad platforms are now offering cross-device tracking, which allows you to see how your users are accessing your content. This can help you make informed planning and buying decisions, and guide you in the best way to allocate your ad spending budget.

Businesses using AdWords can now take advantage of the estimated cross-device conversions feature, which estimates conversions that start as a click on a Google ad on one device and end as a conversion on another device. You can use these statistics to inform your bidding, such as by adjusting your bids specifically for mobile ads based on the value those ads are likely to represent for you.

Earlier this year, Facebook added cross-device tracking to its advertising analytics, noting that this will provide businesses with valuable insight into how and where their campaigns are performing. In announcing this new feature, Facebook provided some interesting statistics, such as the fact that 32 percent of the people who showed interest in a mobile Facebook ad in the U.S. prior to completing would go on to complete that conversion via a desktop within 28 days.

Helpful tip: Cross-device tracking is part of a broader, expanded ability to track leads and customers through numerous actions both online and offline, which could include phone calls and store visits.

7. Facebook revives Atlas

Atlas isn't a completely new addition to the paid advertising universe. It's more like a newly re-introduced and vastly improved tool. Originally acquired by Facebook from Microsoft in 2013, Atlas is an ad server whose main appeal was its ad tracking abilities, allowing advertisers to track the effectiveness of their display ads. While it didn't make much of a splash initially and then seemed to go dormant, Facebook has made a big deal out of its recent re-launch.

According to Facebook, what makes Atlas so important and revolutionary is its ability to track ad campaigns without the use of cookies, instead relying on Facebook's identity management system. An advantage of this (aside from the fact that cookies just aren't very reliable or successful) is that Facebook can track users even if they switch devices along the way as they interact with specific ads or campaigns.

This continuous, cross-device tracking can provide advertisers with valuable insight as to how people are accessing and viewing their ads, which can help guide advertising budget decisions.

At the same time, Atlas also enables advertisers to use what Facebook calls "people-based marketing," focusing on individual users. This means marketers can follow users across devices, platforms and destinations. It also means that advertisers can take advantage of the wealth of behavioral and demographic information Facebook tracks about its users, providing the opportunity for extremely focused targeting.

Helpful tip: Atlas enhances the targeting that B2B marketers can (and should) already do with Facebook ads, such as by filtering their potential audience according to industry, employer or job title.

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