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Online brand advertising is a hot topic these days. While direct response marketers have been leveraging the medium heavily for over a decade, brand marketers are just starting to discover its potential. After all, the majority of consumers brand advertisers want to reach are either already online or likely to be there in the near future. Even better, and unlike traditional media, brand advertisers can leverage the technological underpinnings of the medium to better control exactly who their advertising reaches (ideally, their target audience), and directly measure the impact of the advertising on consumer perception (ideally, shifting them through the classic brand funnel, from building awareness to fostering intent and preference). These capabilities, coupled with the cost effective nature of the medium, should make online advertising a component of any brand-building effort. So how do you take full advantage of the opportunity? Given there are entire books written on this topic, that go into great detail around the plethora of things you could be doing (social, mobile, viral, and a litany of other buzz words), and the down in the weeds details of how to implement any given tactic, I thought I'd take a different approach for this article. Namely, focusing on the (costly) mistakes I often see brand advertisers make as they venture into the world of online advertising. These learnings are drawn directly from the thousands of advertising campaigns that brands have measured and optimized using my company's solutions, as well as my own experience working in this arena for more years than I care to count. Hopefully it will help you avoid some of the more common mistakes brands make as they venture into the online world...

1. Don't lose sight of what you're trying to accomplish

While it sounds like Marketing 101, it never ceases to amaze me how often the primary marketing objective of online advertising campaigns is not clearly defined, articulated, and managed to throughout the course of the campaign. I believe one of the strengths of the online medium - its inherent measurability - is partly to blame for this dynamic. For the very reason that so many metrics are available, advertisers often fail to keep the focus on the **primary** objective of the campaign. Online metrics are so numerous they can quickly become a Tower of Babel, creating mass confusion as everyone tries to define success using a different metric. For an online brand advertising campaign - which is no different from the world of television, radio, or print advertising - the primary marketing objective should equate to a **single**

aspect of the classic Brand Funnel (also referred to as the Consumer Purchase Funnel) against which you are trying to shift consumer perception . In other words, you should be defining

success as improvements caused by the advertising to consumer Awareness, Attitudes, Favorability, Intent, or Preference. The takeaway: While you may choose to measure more than a single brand funnel attribute, or look at other types of online metrics, decisions taken to improve performance or ultimately measure success should be couched in terms of the primary marketing objective of the campaign.

2. Don't use click-through rates to optimize or measure the success of brand advertising campaigns

Speaking of online metrics, this one deserves a call out in itself due to the massive amount of dysfunction it causes for brand advertisers moving into the online medium. The pervasiveness of the click-through rate as a measure of the effectiveness of online advertising traces back to the early days of the internet, when the medium was primarily used by direct response marketers; ever receive an offer to click through and download a free credit report? While perfectly appropriate as a measure of the effectiveness of direct response campaigns, click-through rates are meaningless to brand advertising campaigns. Ford Motor Company doesn't advertise in the hopes that someone will click through on their banner and purchase a car; they are instead trying to shift consumer perception against brand funnel metrics - for example, building awareness around the availability of a new sport utility vehicle. Yet many brand advertisers continue to measure success based on click-through rates, and often make detrimental or even brand-damaging decisions because they are using a meaningless metric. I like to use the following analogy from the world of baseball to make the point that, just because a metric is available to you, doesn't mean it's relevant or that you should use it. Would you ever pick your pitching staff based on their batting averages? Of course not - you'd use their ERA (earned run average). The takeaway: For brand advertising, you should be measuring and optimizing against **Brand Lift**, defined as the percentage increase in consumer perception (for example, awareness of the new sport utility vehicle) of a group of people who have been exposed to your advertising over a group of people who have not been exposed to your advertising. Pay no attention to click-through rates unless you are a performance marketer.

3. Don't fail to choose a technology-savvy partner to execute your campaign

Most brands will be working with a media agency to execute their online initiatives. Be warned - all agencies are not created equal when it comes to getting the most bang for the buck from your online investment. What you don't want: a partner who thinks their job is done once they have deployed your investment and a campaign is up and running. What you do want: a partner who takes full advantage of available technology to monitor and optimize the Brand Lift related to your campaign in real-time, adjusting creative, frequency, and placement in order to produce the best possible outcome. Case in point - a media agency that regularly uses my company's technology to monitor and optimize Brand Lift in real-time recently launched a campaign for a CPG company with the objective of building consumer awareness for a new product offering. The campaign got off to a very good start, generating 23% Brand Lift against the Awareness objective. But this particular agency didn't stop there; by taking advantage of the technology to identify underperforming creative and sites, and re-allocating impressions to better performing creative and sites, they ultimately were able to increase Brand Lift to over 34%, **which equated to an increase of over \$100,000 in effective media spend**

. In other words, without the optimization, the brand would have needed to spend an additional \$100,000 to produce the same result. In another case, one of the media agencies we work with was managing a million dollar campaign for one of the world's largest technology companies, with the objective of increasing Favorability. Halfway through the campaign, our customer noticed it was not generating any Brand Lift. In other words, if nothing was done, the brand was going to be flushing a million dollars down the toilet. By leveraging real-time Brand Lift data, however, this media agency was able to turn the campaign around and generate a respectable increase in Favorability by the time the campaign concluded. The takeaway: When choosing a media agency, ensure they have the technology needed to measure and optimize Brand Lift (NOT click through rates) for your campaign in real time, and are willing to share that information with you on a regular basis. Better yet, invest in the technology yourself, and give the agency access to it, ensuring you maintain visibility into and ownership of this critical data.

4. Don't fail to build relevant benchmarks against which to measure performance over time

Another common mistake I see advertisers make is to focus a lot of attention on the results of a single campaign, particularly when it is a very large campaign. While it is critical to measure and optimize each individual campaign, it's equally important to track the cumulative results of your brand building efforts over time. After all, brands aren't built in a day - or via a single mega-advertising campaign. Your evaluation of the effectiveness of your efforts and the partners you have chosen to work with should be based on this cumulative view of performance. Access to relevant benchmarks is a key component of this equation. Going back to the example above, in which one of the media agencies we work with drove 34% Brand Lift for the campaign they were managing, you might ask the question - is that better or worse than average for campaigns of a similar nature? We get asked all the time to provide "market norms" for this very reason, and as such they are a fundamental part of our solution offering (and if you were wondering, 34% lift against an awareness objective for a CPG company is above average). But our more sophisticated customers go beyond that, using our solution to build out their own normative performance data specific to each of their individual brands and a host of other dynamics related to their advertising strategy. These norms are in some sense superior to more general "market norms" as they control for more variables. The takeaway: View your brand advertising efforts as a living, breathing effort that needs to be monitored and adjusted over time, not as an individual campaign. Build benchmarks for performance that are specific to your advertising strategy which allow you better understand what "good" actually is.

5. Don't relinquish ownership of your online advertising effort

Many brand marketers do not have the same level of expertise around online advertising as they may have with more traditional mediums. Coupled with the fact that the internet can be a confusing place, many brand marketers end up relying heavily on media and creative agencies to manage their online advertising efforts. This is not problematic in itself - agencies often bring a high level of specialized expertise in the space, and can add a lot of value. That does not mean, however, that brand marketers should completely remove themselves from the details of

the development and execution of their "online strategy." I add quotations because, at the end of the day, the online medium is just another channel for brands to reach and engage with their target audience, subject to the same general rules and best practices for marketing and advertising that experienced marketers are intimately familiar with from their work with television, print, and radio. Online is, however, an important component of your larger advertising mix, and as such you shouldn't completely outsource development of the strategy, tactics and results. This is especially the case if you want the flexibility to work with different agencies over time, without losing ownership of your historical data or normative benchmarks. The takeaway: Directly invest in the expertise and technology needed to manage, track and improve your online brand building efforts. Choose technology platforms that allow all of your partners to collaborate directly in these efforts, but that you ultimately maintain ownership around.

Online advertising can be an extremely effective brand building tool as long as you keep a few basic tenets in mind, and work to avoid the common pitfalls I've noted above. Don't be intimidated by all the jargon - the rules of effective marketing and advertising have not changed. Do, however, educate yourself as to the unique aspects of this technologically enabled medium, in order that you can take full advantage of its potential and properly incorporate online advertising into your overall marketing mix.

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